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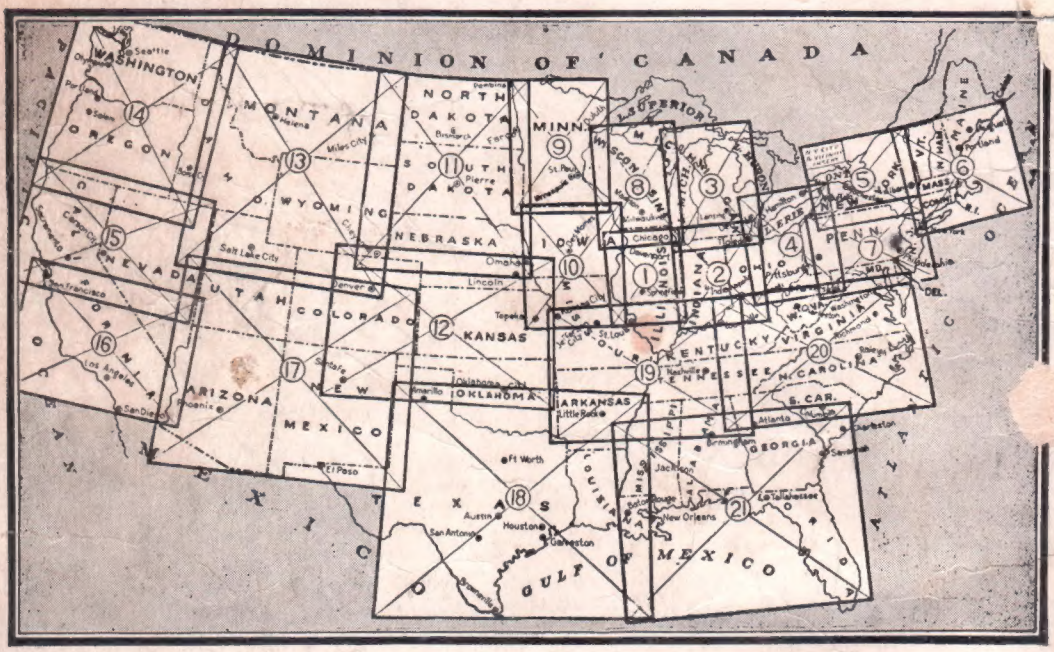

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SIX months have passed and no word has come from *Martin*, hunting gold up the Patate; so *Forster* sets out to rescue him, with a new and strange scheme for dealing with the savage Jivaros he must encounter in the jungle. "YELLOW HEAD" by J. Allan Dunn, is a South American novelette complete in the next issue.

IN MEXICO lies safety for the murderer for whom the entire Texas police organization is searching. All trains from Dallas and San Antonio are being watched and autos searched. Is there *another* way? "FLIGHT," a novelette of the Border, by Thomson Burtis, is complete in the next issue.

"*ACE*" *BROWNELL*, gambler and saloonkeeper, had been elected sheriff of Pinnacle County, as one homesteader put it, "through carelessness;" and when *Ace* incurred "*Slivers*" *Cassidy's* just wrath *Slivers* set himself to see that the error was not going to be repeated. "STEPSONS OF LAW," a novelette of the West, by Frederick J. Jackson, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure* — the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure

MARCH 20, 1923
VOL. XXXIX
NO. 5.

Bad Men Make Good Pickings

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE by FREDERICK J. JACKSON

Author of "Reverse Irish," "Midnight Johnson," etc.

WHEN Jake Humphries stuck a Winchester around a corner of the barn and took a pot shot at Bill Collier he started something. Jake thought that Bill had a warrant for him, which was all wrong, for Bill had that day resigned as deputy sheriff. He had excellent reasons for his resignation. As he had put it to the sheriff—

"I don't mind taking up an odd job of sheriffing, but there's gotta be a little action connected with it."

And the early Summer of 1888 had been notably uneventful down in San Miguel County—altogether *too* peaceful for one of Bill's restless nature.

Jake Humphries made a bull's-eye on his two-hundred-yard shot. He had pulled the sights fine on the middle of Bill's anatomy, but Bill's horse had chosen that instant to jerk up its head. The bullet struck between its eyes.

Jake saw the horse go down. He also saw Bill snatch the carbine from the saddle boot and leap clear as the animal fell in a plunging roll.

That was enough for Jake. He leaped on to his horse, jabbed in the spurs and as long as possible kept the large barn between himself and the irate Mr. Collier. And between the latter and himself, Jake's one ambition now was to put as great a distance as he could. He had been seized by a panic as the result of his shot, and was not greatly to be blamed. Bill Collier was a noted and talented administrator of lead-poisoning.

Jake headed his mount into a small cañon and breathed a sigh of relief. Temporarily he was safe from Bill's Winchester hypodermic.

Bill stalked angrily to the ranch-house, where the only person he found was the Chinese cook.

"Who's here, John?" he demanded.

"All gone! Mist' Humflees he just go down cañon."

"Jake Humphries! Huh!" cogitated Bill.

"Bad Men Make Good Pickings," copyright, 1923, by Frederick J. Jackson.

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He knew Humphries as a mean-eyed, no-'count, itinerant ranch hand.

"Why in —— did Jake take a shot at me and then fan out of here? Something tells me——

"Come on to the bunk-house, John," he ordered. "You show me Jake's bunk."

Gladly the Chinaman complied. In his Celestial mind he had no use for Humphries; if Mr. Collier could get anything on him it would be a perfect day.

Jake's blankets were gone. In the bunk was nothing but flattened straw, some discarded socks and a worn-out shirt. On the floor lay a piece of tanned buckskin. A few short strips indicated that Humphries lately had been engaged in cutting thongs from the hide. Beneath the bunk lay some assorted bits of junk and——

Bill reached for the article which had caught his eye. It was a small canvas bag on which was printed

BANK OF LAS VEGAS
$1000

Bill's eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"Ever see this before, John?"

"No see. Boss he lightum check all time."

"Huh! John, do you ever have a hunch?"

"Sure, all time! Mist' Humflees stealum money flom bank. He no good all time."

"Bull's-eye, John! But I didn't know you could read English."

"No can. Ink on sack same thing gold on bank window."

"You're a wonder!" laughed Bill. "Now listen here! If you've got any ideas in your benighted mind keep them to yourself. Savvy?"

"All time. You gettum Mist' Humflees?"

"You're —— right I'll get him. He shot the best horse I ever owned."

Bill started for the corral. The cook headed for the woodpile, where he proceeded to swing an ax with unusual vigor to the accompaniment of a high-pitched, nasal selection of Chinese opera—or something. It was a song of joy; the much respected Mr. Collier would soon remove the pelican from John's goldfish pond of life, the pelican being the disagreeable Mr. Humflees.

Bill roped a horse, saddled it and rode down to the body of his late departed pet. He removed the bridle from the dead animal, unstrapped a latigo, made fast one end of a riata to a cinch ring and dragged the cinch from beneath the body. He rode back to the corral and placed his own saddle and his light baggage on the horse.

Mounting, he rode over to the woodpile.

"Oh, John! Tell the boss I'll bring the horse back or leave it somewhere for him. Tell him I'll pay if he doesn't get it back."

"Me tell. All light with boss."

"So long!"

And Bill rode away on the trail of Jake Humphries.

The fact that he was no longer a deputy sheriff of San Miguel county made no difference to Bill. It was largely in an unofficial capacity that he now hunted Jake. His face burned red with anger at the thought of his dead horse. And that bullet had *not* been sped at the *horse*. Why had Jake shot?

The canvas bag supplied an answer. Jake's horse had been in readiness for a journey, blankets and war-bag behind the saddle. A month before, the Bank of Las Vegas had been stuck up by three masked men. The hold-up and getaway had been well planned; there had not been the slightest clue to the bandits. Without a doubt Jake had been one of them, and now had in his possession part of the loot.

Jake had been wise enough to hold on to his job until there would be no suspicious connection between the bank robbery and his departure from the country. When a bandit with an uneasy conscience and several thousands of stolen dollars in his possession sees a well-known deputy sheriff come riding up it is not going to add much to his peace of mind. Jake momentarily had lost his head. Thus reasoned Bill.

As a matter of fact, Bill had possessed no suspicion at all concerning Jake. Bill had resigned, had drawn his savings—six hundred dollars—from the bank, had saddled up to ride forth and seek pastures new and full of action. He was still seeking them, but the shooting of his horse had brought up a a little business to be transacted *en route*.

Mr. Collier was essentially a business man. "Bad men make good pickings!" was his maxim. And Jake Humphries would stand picking to the tune of seven hundred and fifty dollars, for this amount had been offered for each of the three men who had stuck up the bank.

To Bill's mind seven hundred and fifty

dollars would not compensate for the killing of his horse. The balance would be made up by the joy Bill would take in placing Jake Humphries behind the bars. And Jake might lead the way to the other bandits. Fifteen hundred more.

"Not so bad," mused Bill.

Jake was heading to the westward. It had rained the day before, and the hoof-prints of the fugitive's horse were distinct in the soft red earth. The trail led across two creeks, headwaters of the Pecos, and across the line into Santa Fé County. The town of Glorieta lay a short distance ahead.

"Easy pickings," thought Bill. "I'll spot Jake's horse outside some saloon. Then I'll slip in and nab him."

However, Bill had another think coming. A few minutes sufficed to make a thorough search of the small town, the population of which was less than two hundred. Jake's horse was not to be located. Bill galloped down to the Santa Fé Railroad station.

"Jake Humphries!" repeated the station-master. "Sure, that must have been the *hombre* who grabbed the 1:40 local. Took his horse in the baggage-car."

"That's him," agreed Bill. "Did you talk to him?"

"Yeh, we chewed the fat a while. He wanted to know the quickest way to get to Pinkerton County. That made me wonder. Pinkerton is the best hide-out in the Territory. Is he wanted?"

"Some," admitted Bill, taking a fresh chew and offering the can of fine-cut to the old railroad man.

"Why don't you wire ahead? You might head him off at Kennedy. The local's already there, but he'll have to wait for a train on the N. M. C."

"Haven't got a warrant—yet," explained Bill. "This is largely a personal matter anyway. I'll take him back without a warrant. He's a blamed fool for leaving a wide-open trail by taking his horse along, and I'll get him in a blamed fool way."

Bill spat and looked along the tracks to the eastward. The rails vibrated with the approach of a train.

"What's coming?" he inquired.

"Fast freight. I'm holding the board against him. He'll stop for orders."

"Can you fix it for——"

"Fix nawthin'! Just climb in the cab and tell the engineer his dad said it was all right. Rules don't amount to much on this division."

Bill unbuckled his spurs and handed them together with ten dollars to the agent.

"Tie the spurs on the saddle. Take the horse to a stable, then send word to Dan Larrabee to come and get him. Pay the feed-bill out of the ten and buy some cigars for yourself with what's left. The saddle is mine, but Dan will take care of it for me."

"Sure, son," grinned the other. "The sooner Dan gets the horse the more cigars I buy. Watch me—and thanks. There, you might give these orders to Frank—he's my son—the engineer."

II

BILL arrived in Kennedy just one hour too late to make connections with Jake Humphries, for the latter had made connections with a south-bound local on the New Mexico Central. He had purchased a ticket for Willard, some fifty miles down the line, where the Santa Fé again crossed the tracks of the N. M. C.

Another thinking act on Bill's part resulted in his sending two telegrams, one to the sheriff of Las Vegas County, asking for reappointment as a deputy and that a warrant be telegraphed ahead to Willard. The other message was to the marshal of Willard and instructed him to capture Humphries. This second telegram hurt Bill right where he lived, for the marshal would demand a split of the reward.

Bill waited and boarded another train, in the smoker of which he chewed fine-cut as he cursed the necessity of having been forced to call for assistance in capturing Jake. Still, he reflected, half a reward was better than none, and it was easy money. What a fool Jake Humphries was to leave a wide-open trail! Thus thought Bill.

Full of anticipation, he arrived in Willard. Two minutes after stepping off the train he reversed his mental gears. *He* instead of Jake was the fool. Jake had taken his horse from the baggage-car at Clark, a station less than ten miles south of Kennedy, and had struck off cross-country. Buying the ticket to Willard had been a herring dragged across the trail—an overripe herring, for it had caused Bill's sense of smell to work overtime, to the consequent neglect of his reasoning power. Bill grinned weakly in acknowledgment of temporary defeat.

Pinkerton County! Without a doubt this was Jake's destination. Bill cursed some more for not having kept this in mind; it might have saved him the futile trip to Willard.

He decided to make tracks immediately for Pinkerton. When he discovered that there would be no north-bound train until the next day, for a while he contemplated setting fully into motion the machinery of the law, to have the peace officers of every town and hamlet watching for Jake to show up.

"No," was his final decision; "I'll get a —— of a lot more satisfaction, as well as more money, by rounding him up myself. I'll follow the son-of-a-gun to Pinkerton and points beyond."

These last are not Bill's exact words.

With that, Bill went to dinner at the hotel. The dinner was bad; the hotel bed was as hard and lumpy as the boulders of a river-bed; the greasy breakfast was almost uneatable. Bill's temper was at the snapping point when he took the first train north.

His state of mind was not sweetened when at Kennedy he learned that Jake Humphries had ridden through the town again late the previous afternoon. Acquiring this information lost Bill the train on which he had arrived from Willard. The thought of forking a cayuse and trailing Humphries direct was of particular appeal, but further thought caused him to await another train.

The second day following found him on the box beside the driver of a six-horse stage bound for Pinkerton City. He was the only passenger. Bill was taking a blind chance. If he could beat Jake to Pinkerton City, so much the better. The fugitive would be expecting *pursuit*, and would never imagine danger lying ahead. It was Bill's intention to get a horse in Pinkerton City and start back over the stage road to meet his quarry.

"Pop" Crossett, the grizzled old stage-driver, was garrulous.

"Yes, sirree, I been snaggin' bronks over this road for goin' on eighteen year. Only lost one hoss. Holdups? Sure! I git so's I almost knows when to expect them. I jest pull up, reach high and wait for the word to drive on. I never tries to interfere. It ain't healthy—with 'Snake' Humphries' gang on the road."

"Humphries!" exclaimed Bill.

"That's the name. Snake Humphries."

"Ever hear of *Jake* Humphries?"

"U-u-umm! I reckon that might be Snake's cousin. There was a whole tribe of them Humphries around these parts goin' on twenty year ago, but they all turned bad, and a lot of them got bumped off by *hombres* who was wuss. But this Snake Humphries and what's left of the family jest about run things. Banditin' is a payin' business in this county."

"How about the sheriff?"

"Hah!" cackled Pop. "They ain't none now. Snake makes it open season on sheriffs all the year. 'Git out or git planted,' is Snake's ultee-mattum. Only strangers will take the job. Them that don't *git*, gits planted. One of them even jumped the job and joined Snake's gang.

"The board of county commissioners are sure gittin' rode plenty by their constitchents, but I ain't noticin' none of them constitchents hankerin' to take the job. They know better.

"They ain't even a peace officer in the town. We got an official bad-man who kinda keeps the peace by not lettin' anybody else git wuss than he is. He's a cuss, dang him! 'Shady' Bowen's his name, and I'd sure take a day off and fill him full of buckshot if he monkeyed with me like he makes life plain —— for some of them storekeepers in town.

"Nope! We seldom has a holdup goin' in. The freight-wagons git cleaned of grub once in a while. But when a stage goes out with bullion we sometimes gits action. I sat right here in this seat many a time when express messengers sittin' right where you are and gassin' with me like you are have been drilled plenty. A shotgun messenger don't hold his job long on this run."

"Like sheriffs in this county," commented Bill. "Say, what kind of a place is Pinkerton City?"

"——! She ain't a city. She's a bad mistake in judgment. The railroad misses her by thirty-five mile; the steel passes up the hull county. She's sure isolated. Pinkerton City is the county seat, which is kinda rough on the county. Gambling does a lot toward supportin' Pink City—minin' and cattle-raisin' contributin' the most, of course."

"Sweet layout," mused Bill. "I wonder——"

"*Stick 'em high!*" came a harsh command from a masked man who had suddenly stepped into the road.

Old Pop jammed down the brake, pulled back on the lines and brought the cumbersome vehicle to a stop. Up went his hands. Five more bandits leaped from the brush ahead. Several others swarmed at the sides. Bill's hands had gone up, following the example set by Pop.

"That's right," commended the latter. "It's sure death to start anything. They's always too danged many of them. We couldn't run away, either—not on this upgrade."

"Don't look surprized, Pop," called out one of the bandits. "This ain't a reg'lar holdup; it's a special matin-ee for the *hombre* alongside you. Any more passengers? No. Jump down, now, Mr. Collier, late of Las Vegas."

Bill leaped to the ground.

"How'd you know my name?"

"That's right—Jake forgot to give us a knockdown."

"Shut up! You —— fool!" was a profane order.

Bill recognized Jake's voice.

"Search him, boys! Show him how we treat outside sheriffs when they come pirootin' in this county."

Three minutes later Mr. Collier had been bereft of his six hundred dollars, his Colt and his light baggage. As an afterthought Jake Humphries ordered Bill's boots to be removed.

"I sure admire them," said Jake.

Hilariously four of the outlaws yanked off the footwear and then proceeded to make a clean job of it by removing everything from Bill's pockets except a hole in one of them.

"Hump along!" was the command.

Bill climbed back on to the box. Pop released the brake and urged the horses toward Pinkerton City.

Bill had plenty to say, and said it. The scanty remnants of his good nature had gone along with his money and his can of fine-cut.

"Not so loud!" cautioned Pop. "I can't hold the hosses now we're on a down-grade when you orate so scandalous. They think you want more speed."

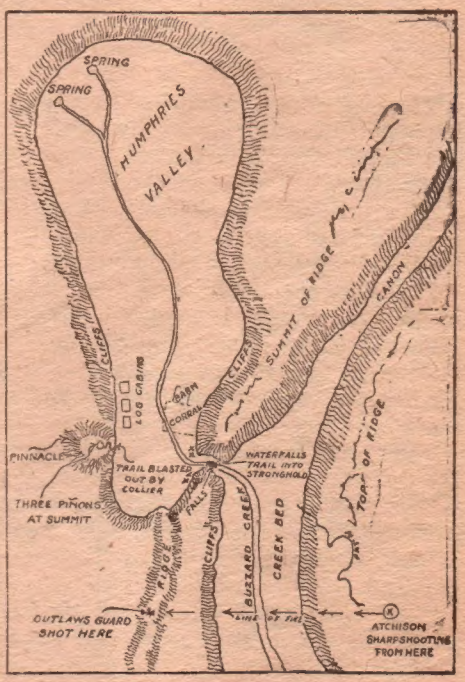
Bill laughed, but the laugh was hollow.

"So that was Jake's idea of something funny! Taking my boots and tobacco was sure rubbing it in. He's brewed up a mess of trouble, and I'm sure gonna enjoy making him drink it. From now on till I land that gang I'm a resident of Pinkerton County. Any rewards open for this Humphries gang?"

"Plenty—for all the good they do. No one ever collects, so the county's got kinda reckless in postin' rewards."

"Gosh!" said Bill. "I've been looking for this county for the last ten years and didn't know it. I've always wanted to get rich, and this looks like my chance."

"No chance at all—except for sure death," grunted Pop. "It's tough luck, pardner, about your boots. I got an old pair in my cabin, and they might fit. You kin try them. And my plug's ready if you want a chaw."



"Thanks," said Bill gratefully.

For a time there was silence. Then Bill began to ask questions in regard to the Humphries gang and the country in which they hid out. Pop's answers were lengthy and full of information. So when Bill arrived in Pinkerton City, for a newcomer he was well posted.

PINKERTON CITY was disappointing. It sprawled haphazard between the foot-hills to the east and Buzzard Creek. It consisted chiefly of one brick combination schoolhouse-courthouse, one brick bank, two churches,

a few brick stores, eleven brick saloons and about one hundred dwellings and unclassified structures. The majority of these were also built of brick, for old man Pinkerton had early established the town's one and only manufacturing industry, a brick-kiln. It had been his desire to make the town "a substantial one." Brick was the cheapest building-material. The community also boasted one large and dusty plaza.

According to Pop Crossett the county assayed ninety per cent. mountains, six per cent. hard luck and four per cent. outlaws. Bill had also gathered that the board of county commissioners specialized upon petty bickerings and foolish economy. The chairman of the board was the unofficial mayor of the town.

The last elected sheriff had been killed; his appointed successor had resigned. No one wanted the office; that is, no one who knew the board of county commissioners and its policy. Pop Crossett opined that the board had done more than the outlaws to cause the resignation. Pop was right.

The board of commissioners was in session in the courtroom when Bill arrived in Pinkerton City. Pop escorted him over and introduced him as new timber for sheriff. First, however, Pop had brought Bill the spare boots.

"Kin yuh furnish references?" queried the chairman.

"Six years in the Texas Rangers, one year as sheriff of Lincoln County, eight months as chief deputy in Las Vegas County, six months as——"

"That's enough," interrupted the commissioner. "Yuh want a job, and we need a sheriff."

He turned to the other members.

"Is he appointed? Those objecting stand up."

No one stirred.

"Unanimous, eh? Clerk, make a special note of the fact that for once this board voted unanimously."

Bill expected a smile. Instead of that, the chairman glared in turn at each of the other four members. They were still sizing up Bill.

"You're the sheriff," continued the chairman, walking over to Bill and giving him a bunch of keys. "The office includes those of town marshal and county tax-collector. Town and county officers are combined to save expenses. We'll look up your record by telegraph."

Bill accepted the office by taking the keys and a silver star. He was glad to get the job, for it seemed to promise action. He walked out of the building and over to an establishment topped by a sign reading—

PHEELY'S EMPORIUM.

As Sheriff, Bill thought that his credit would be good. He had another think coming. The credit rating of sheriffs, especially one with no assets at all, was lower than a lizard's knees. From experience, the merchants knew that sheriffs did not last long in Pinkerton.

Still jingling the bunch of keys, Bill walked along the plaza toward the jail. Beneath his breath he murmured hard words anent merchants with no conception of public spirit, who would hold out no encouragement to a law enforcer willing to work overtime on the job.

The jail was a stout brick structure facing the plaza. In front was a wooden porch about a foot and a half in height, and without a railing. It extended the full width of the building. Its tin roof was supported by five large posts. Two windows with heavy bars on the outside opened on to the porch. To the left of these was the door, which Bill opened, after trying several of the keys in order to find the right one. The door was of oak, three inches thick, covered on the outside with sheet iron strapped with iron bars. The latter were held in place by heavy bolts passing through the door.

Bill found himself in a room perhaps ten feet by fifteen. What immediately caught his gaze and interest were the printed dodgers—reward notices—plastered on two of the walls. For the time being he looked no further. He tore down several of them, where to his knowledge the outlaws had been captured and sentenced in some other part of the territory. Then he studied the notices dated within the last year, rewards offered by counties, by the State, by railroads, express companies, the stage company, by mining corporations. He counted them. They numbered sixty-eight.

In a rack stood ten Winchester rifles, all of .44 caliber. Hanging on nails were several cartridge-belts and holsters containing Colt .44's. Rifles and revolvers both shot the same .44-40 cartridge, which contained not enough powder for the weight of the

bullet. At short range the rifles were man-getters, but good at long range only for moral effect.

Bill examined some of the firearms. They were in good condition. Oil had been applied plentifully and a small cork stuck in each muzzle the better to protect the rifling from rust. Ammunition was plentiful.

Bill buckled a gun-belt around his hips, wiped the oil from a Colt, loaded it and began to feel more at home. The other furnishings of this outer room consisted only of a table and four chairs. A small adjoining room contained three cots with blankets folded on each.

"Well, I sleep, even if I don't eat," was Bill's thought as he continued to explore.

The entrance from the office into the cell corridor was through a door of heavy, perpendicular iron bars. Beyond this lay the corridor, on both sides of which were cells built of iron bars and grillwork. There were eight large cells, but no prisoners.

Bill entered one cell and examined it with an approving eye. The narrow window was barred with iron rods nearly an inch in thickness, set in masonry. He took notice that the brick wall was eighteen inches through, and lined on the inside with concrete.

Backing into the corridor, he walked to the rear of the building. There was no rear door; the only entrance to the jail was through the front office. And on the inside of the one front door three heavy bars could be dropped into place. The structure had the earmarks of having been built to stand a siege.

"Fine!" thought Bill. "She'll sure hold anybody I want to keep."

With that he left the building, locked the door and hastened back to the room where the county commissioners were having their fortnightly quarrel.

HE SLID into a seat and listened. An argument was on. A gentleman wearing a stovepipe hat, a shiny, near-green-but-once-black Prince Albert, an unkempt Van Dyke and enough self-importance for a dozen State Senators announced in a squeaky voice that the other members of the board lacked sufficient intelligence to come in out of the rain. The four outraged commissioners raised loud and simultaneous voices, but the squeaky voice could be heard above them like a bugle in a skirmish.

Some one slipped into the seat next to Bill. It was the stage-driver, who had just finished stabling his horses. He haggled a large piece from his plug, then offered it to Bill.

"Quiet as —— in here today," stated Pop, disgust in his tone. "I thought there'd be a little excitement."

"My ——!" said Bill. "Is this quiet?"

"Yeh! You oughta hear them when they're goin' good. Each tried to outshout the others till after midnight last month, and it was only about whether they should pay six bucks apiece for two lanterns that would last forever, or five and a quarter apiece for two lanterns of the same kind they were replacin'.

"The guy with the squeak is Horatio Pheely. He owns the bank, two stores and the only stovepipe hat in the county. He's tighter than the belly of a calf full of sorghum. Two-bits don't matter no more to him than one eye and both lungs.

"If he ever lost the lungs he'd be outa luck. They're good lungs. He can keep up that squeak all night. The only good thing about him—and it ain't good at that—is that he's tighter with the county's money than he is with his own.

Bill listened to the five-sided verbal battle until he lost patience and strode to the platform to face the board. He held up a hand for silence, and got it.

"Gents," he began. "A while ago you voted me in as sheriff."

"As sheriff *pro tem*," squeaked Mr. Pheely.

Bill grinned uncertainly.

"That's a new one on me."

"Meaning until the next election," supplied the educated Mr. Pheely.

"If he lasts that long," put in the chairman.

"Well," admitted Bill. "I may work myself out of a job before then. But I want a jailor, and a good one. Lacking a good nervy jailor there'll be a jail delivery as soon as I get out of town—from what I've heard."

"But you ain't got no prisoners," yelped the chairman.

"I'll get them," promised Bill, leading up to what he wanted, namely, "eats" for himself. "The sheriff feeds the prisoners, doesn't he? There's no grub at the jail. I

s'pose I sign vouchers for what grub I order at the stores just to be ready for prisoners."

"You don't!" shouted another commissioner. "I got a contract from the county to furnish prisoners with meals from my restaurant."

"But I gotta have some grub for my posse to take along when we start out," pursued Bill.

"Sure—when you git a posse," stated Pheely. "You git your grub and ammunition at my store."

"Closed corporation, ain't she?" grinned Bill.

"That's none of your business," snapped Pheely. "And for your depities you git one hundred dollars a month—no more. We've got to keep down expenses."

"I guess you do it," drawled Bill. "Do you limit the amount of ammunition you furnish?"

"No-o. That wouldn't be good business."

"Not for your store anyway," Bill pointed out, taking a keen delight in rasping Mr. Pheely.

The latter raised his voice in an outraged squeak, but Bill in haste walked from the room and over to the emporium.

An hour later behind the locked office door he sat at the table which served as the sheriff's desk. Before him lay three empty sardine tins and a flock of cracker crums. In his hand was a can of peaches. With a sigh he fished out the last half peach in the can, swallowed it, then raised the can to his lips and drained the juice.

"The posse is sure going on half rations."

Bill spoke aloud in the physical contentment following a full stomach. He opened a parcel containing a dozen tins of fine-cut and a dozen bags of smoking-material.

"Lucky that Squeaky Pheely wasn't in the store. He might have hollered at the tobacco. But I'm sitting sweet now. Plenty of grub, guns, shells, tobacco and a place to sleep. Also with a young fortune in sight.

He turned a contented eye toward the reward notices plastered on the wall.

At twilight Bill started out to size up the town. Some of the business places closed their doors with the coming of darkness. Not so with the saloons. They lighted up and looked cheerful, inviting, compared with their drab dinginess by day.

Their remaining open at night, however, was merely a matter of form. Most of them were not making expenses. Hard times lay heavily on the county. Most of the mines had closed down; they could not afford to operate for the benefit of Snake Humphries and his gang.

Bill tentatively pushed aside one of the paneled, swinging half-doors of the Maverick saloon. The bartender called out a cheery greeting and made a vigorous show of polishing a glass. Bill walked over to the bar. He remembered the bartender's face and tried to place it. He in turn was scrutinized keenly.

"Sergeant Collier!" was the exclamation from behind the bar as the other's face cracked in a friendly smile.

"Bull's-eye!" grinned Bill. "I know you, but where——"

"Alpine—down in Brewster County, Texas," supplied the other. "My name's McCann. I ran a place in Alpine—the Lone Star saloon. You dropped in there one night when 'Red' Corkins was shooting up the town. You had a warrant for Red. I helped you handcuff him."

"Sure! Red had hit me so hard with a beer bottle that I never did know till now who helped me make the arrest."

Bill stuck out his hand. McCann clasped it heartily.

"What'll you have?"

"Nothing. I'm broke. The Humphries gang stuck me up as I came in over the pass. I was appointed sheriff here less than fifteen minutes after I struck town this afternoon."

"You're an insulting galoot," grinned McCann. "I said, 'What'll you have?' and then you give me a song and dance about being broke. What do I care if you're broke? To get Sergeant Collier of the Rangers as sheriff here is the best news I've heard since I left Texas. I feel like setting them up for the whole town."

"Rye for mine," said Bill.

McCann reached for a bottle and two glasses.

"How'd you come to leave Texas?" he inquired.

"Not enough action," was the reply.

"You'll get enough here. In Texas I never saw more than two Rangers together at one time, but they certainly got results. I've often wondered if a pair of them could do anything in Pinkerton County."

They drank silently.

"Business seems bad," commented Bill.

"It's worse than that. I'm thinking of

pulling up stakes. If the mines would open up— But they won't. Since the 'Little Six' holdup they're afraid to open up."

"What was that?" inquired Bill.

"The finish," said McCann. "Last year six of the small mine-owners got tired of losing a lot of their cleanups to Humphries. They imported two gunmen apiece and sent out their collected shipments on a special stage. About one hundred thousand dollars altogether. It looked safe with twelve picked gun-fighters riding guard.

"But Snake Humphries and about thirty men jumped them near the top of the pass. Only two of the guards got away with whole skins. Ten were wounded; four died. Snake got the gold.

"That put a crimp in the mining game here, in which there ain't too big a margin of profit with the low-grade ores they have to mill. Seven hundred men were laid off, and they left the county to get work elsewhere. Only three mines running now—half force at that. Business in every line is stagnant."

"Huh!" grunted Bill. "I'd think it would be. Taking away seven hundred free spenders has blotted many a town off the map. I can see where it hit everybody here. Just feeding seven hundred big appetites meant a good home market for the ranchers. The merchants miss the cash spent for clothes, tobacco and ammunition. The saloons and games probably got the rest of the pay-checks."

"You've got it sized up to a whisper," nodded McCann. "Have another slug of rye."

FOR perhaps an hour they talked, and Bill gained much information of value. Then he started down the street in the direction of the jail.

The tinkle of a piano coupled with the blare of a cornet attracted him into the Bonanza Dance Hall, the only honkatonk remaining open. Two others had closed for lack of patronage. The Bonanza, too, had been hard hit, but the proprietor was sticking it out, depending upon Saturday nights for somewhere near normal patronage.

The two-piece orchestra played wearily, mechanically. Only two couples were on the dance floor. Four women, of uncertain age, lounged near the bar. The younger and prettier girls had departed for livelier fields. Two of the women started toward him. In haste Bill ducked back into the street.

"My gosh! What chromos!" was his thought.

The front porches of saloons and places of business formed a sidewalk of a kind. But most of them were of different heights. To a stranger the dusty street was safer; there was less risk of stumbling in the darkness. Bill preferred to walk in the dust. The latter incidentally muffled his footfalls.

Thus it was he approached unheard to the front of the next saloon. Outlined against the light of a soap-stoned window were figures, one a girl, the other a tall, bulky man.

"Let me go by. Mother is waiting," begged the girl.

"She can wait!" was the answer. "You've put me off long enough."

He seized her in an attempt at a kiss.

Smack! But it was her hand futilely slapping his face. She struggled and cried over and over:

"Let me go! Let me go!"

Bill stepped on to the porch.

"What's the trouble here?"

The man straightened up, a hand going after the gun low on his thigh. Bill quickly shoved the muzzle of his Colt against the other's stomach. Up went his hands.

From the corner of his eye Bill stole a look at the girl. She wore a dress of some plain white soft stuff. Her hair was drawn back in simple fashion. Half of her face was illumined by the soft light through the frosted window; her eyes were sweet, appealing. Momentarily she stood in the light, then slipped away into the darkness.

"Who in —— are you?" was the profane query to Bill.

"If it interests you any, I'm the new sheriff. Who are you?"

"My name's Bowen. You're *new*, all right, or you wouldn't monkey with me."

"Is that so?" drawled Bill. "You don't look so dangerous. Women who don't want to be bothered are to be let alone after this. Savvy!"

"Not a —— bit!"

"Try it again and you will," promised Bill.

With that he ordered Bowen to walk into the saloon. While the doors were still flapping back and forth, Bill headed for his office.

Uppermost in his thoughts was the face of the girl as he had seen it in the soft light.

"Just like an angel," he murmured.

III

THREE days passed, and Bill had accomplished nothing more than a long ride alone into the mountains. He had found it impossible to get the type of deputies he wanted. He wanted only men who would be with him heart, soul and shooting eye. Pinkerton County citizens plainly were reluctant to tamper with Snake Humphries.

In disgust Bill thought it over and then spent another day familiarizing himself with the near-by mountains. From observation and by talking to some of the ranchers he learned more about the stronghold which served as headquarters for the bandits. Then he sat down and wrote a letter to Dick Atchison, a former range mate, who was then up in Wyoming. The letter read thusly:

Well Dick old socks I saw in the paper where you won the gold medal in the shooting contest at the Chey. roundup last month. You will have a bang-up chance to use that shooting eye down here. You and me can both make a good stake cleaning up this county. She runs a high percentage of bad men and —— near every one of them assays big in cash money offered for rewards.

Outside that the county ain't worth two bits Mex the square mile but she has sure got a honest on the job sheriff. I am him Dick and I will make you my chief deputy. We ought to split enough reward money to start us on a bang-up ranch of our own. Remember when we used to talk about it. Here is our chance.

You were the guy who invented that about bad men making good pickings. Hump along down here Dick and get in on the fancy pickings. If that part of the country is gettng to quiet for some of the boys who would rather shoot than eat tell them where I am. That will be enough for those who know me. One or two good men will be enough.

There's a bandit trust in this county. A guy by the name of Snake Humphries cornered the industry. He's got up to maybe forty men under him from what I hear and they all hole up in a natural fort. I trailed a guy here from Las Vegas thats how I got in on this good thing. I was a stranger when I came here but the commissioners thought so much of me that they made me sheriff.

At the post-office Bill was hailed by Mr. Pheely and the postmaster. The latter was also the telegraph operator.

"The stage was held up half-way between here and the railroad. Snake got the clean-up from the Pinkerton Consolidated. Twelve thousand!"

Pheely owned stock in this mine, therefore his breathlessness.

"That so?"

Bill's calmness aroused Pheely's wrath.

"That's so!" he squeaked. "What are you goin' to do about it?"

"Not a thing," answered Bill. "What's the use? It's too late. By now the gang is up by the headwaters of Buzzard Creek, and an army couldn't get at them. I've shaken the livers out of those choice specimens of crowbait the county furnishes me instead of horses, and they need rest. In fact they need a long rest, with two bullets as starters. And it's no use of me starting out alone."

"You're a poor excuse for a sheriff," snorted Pheely.

"And this is the same kind of a county—only worse," grinned Bill. "So long, gents. I'm going to my library."

The day was Saturday, and Bill was intent in his study of literature. His library consisted of some sixty-odd volumes, many of them illustrated—the reward notices on the walls of his office. Many of them he had already known by heart before coming to Pinkerton County. The others he read and reread until he knew them, too. During the coming night he hoped to cash in on this knowledge gained by study. Riders were already drifting into town for the week-end carouse.

Two hours after sundown he drifted into the Bonanza, where about forty men had gathered. On the stage at the far end of the dance hall stood a girl in a short, tinseled dress. To the accompaniment of the piano she began to sing—

"Darling, I am growing old,
Silver threads among the gold——"

Bill remained to listen. It was so different from the usual honkatonk stuff. Once or twice he thought that the girl was looking straight at him.

The song finished, after a smattering of applause the musicians struck up a lively polka. About ten couples swung on to the floor. The singer came down from the stage and across the dance floor, avoiding the dancers and paying no attention to the men who hailed her with invitations to dance or drink. She headed straight for Bill. She stopped in front of him.

"I want to thank you—for the other night," she said.

"What other night?"

And then Bill recognized her. Beneath rouge, powder and paint was the face he had seen in the soft light from the saloon window. Her eyes were the same, but this time the lashes were heavily beaded. Bill for a moment stared almost in unbelief, then blurted out:

"My ——! And I thought you were an angel!"

With that he turned abruptly and sought the open air.

On the veranda he stopped and stiffened. All thought of the girl dropped swiftly from his mind. Mounting the three steps leading up from the street came a man, his face full in the light coming from within the hall. Bill immediately knew him as "Ace" Murphy, whose picture adorned the wall of the county rogues' gallery. Mr. Murphy was worth one thousand dollars on the hoof to the sheriff of an adjoining county.

Out came Bill's Colt.

"Turn around!" was his order.

Mr. Murphy hastily complied, was led out of the light, disarmed and marched down to the jail.

"Number one!" exulted Bill, slamming shut the cell door.

Thereupon he went back to the bright kerosene lights to pick up what the night offered.

Sunday morning found four of the cells occupied, three of them by much wanted outlaws. One at a time Bill had captured them so quietly that their comrades had not missed them until later, and as yet had not learned to where they had disappeared.

The fourth prisoner was not exactly an outlaw. He was none other than Shady Bowen, the town bully. Mr. Bowen was a two-gun man, gambler and what not, who bore a reputation and disposition as mild as vitriol.

Mr. Bowen had come upon Bill marching a prisoner toward the jail and had started to break up the arrest. The attempted interference had been short-lived. Bill had been keeping the muzzle of his Colt against his prisoner's back. A short, vicious overhand swing with the gun had sufficed to put Mr. Bowen temporarily in the land of dreams. Bill had then forced his prisoner to assist in carrying the unconscious man to the jail, handcuffing them together for safety.

At noon on Sunday Mr. Bowen was released, a careful study of the reward notices having convinced Bill that the bully had no market value. Bill was glad to let him go; he was not gunning for small fry. Mr. Bowen left the jail with a grouch, a large throbbing bump on his head and a fervent desire to drink about a quart of Mr. Collier's blood.

Mr. Collier likewise was in an ill humor, due to the fact that he had recognized four other bandits and had been unable to gather them in. These four had stuck together, and with them had been several more gun-carrying, ugly-looking customers. To have started something single-handed would have been worse than foolhardy—it would have been suicide.

ON MONDAY afternoon came clanking footsteps on the jail veranda. Bill turned in his chair to face the door. Through the portal entered six feet of truculence. Close-set, hard, dark eyes glared from above a beak nose, a short, bristly mustache and a protruding chin.

"You the sheriff?" he barked out.

"You're a good guesser," admitted Bill.

"Shady Bowen tells me you've got Ace Murphy locked up."

"I have."

"For what?"

"Turn around and read."

The strange turned and spotted Murphy's picture on a reward notice. While his back momentarily was turned, Bill hastily fished out his own Colt and held it behind his chair. Something warned him to be ready; trouble seemed due. He had taken an instinctive dislike to the stranger and everything about him.

"You better turn him loose!"

Menace and scarcely veiled contempt lay heavily in the visitor's tone.

"Who says so?"

Bill was calm, but his eyes had narrowed; his right arm had tensed.

"I do!"

"Who the —— are you?" drawled Bill. "Seems to me that you're taking a heavy load on a weak back. You'd do better to speak soft and low and say, 'Please.' Another crack like that and you'll be going out that door on the end of my boot."

The other's face turned livid, then paled again. His arm crooked slightly at the elbow.

Bill started to arise. With disconcerting swiftness the stranger went for his gun. Bill's hand came up smoking; speed was everything, for the other's Colt was out of the holster.

Ace Murphy's would-be rescuer slumped heavily to the floor. Bill had intended to put a bullet through the right shoulder of the gunman. But the latter's gun had come out like a flash. Bill had blazed away in self-defense, and in his haste his aim had been wild by a foot. He had shot the other through the heart.

"Good God!" was Bill's thought. "What was I up against? This guy's Colt came out like it had a spring under it. There was *kill* in his eyes. If I hadn't had the gun in my hand I'd be the one on the floor."

He then wondered as to the identity of the dead man. His photograph was not on the wall, but several of the descriptions fitted him in a general way. None of them, however, mentioned the beak nose. Bill finally gave it up and hastened down the street to "Doc" Hostings' office.

Doc was the only physician in Pinkerton City. There had been another, subsidized by the mine owners, but he had gone to more profitable territory with the closing of the mines. Hostings practised medicine, did a little veterinary surgery and on the side was the county agent for several patented contrivances. He was also the county coroner.

When Bill walked into the office Doc was trying to assemble a small model of a patent windmill.

"Say, Doc, I—" began Bill.

"Anybody sick or hurt?" interrupted Doc.

"Dead," said Bill.

"Then he can wait. See if you can put this thing together."

Bill lent a hand and a fertile brain. Within five minutes the model had been set up and was spinning merrily in the blast of a pair of bellows which had come with the agent's model.

"There she is," voiced Doc. "I been monkeyin' with her for two hours. Who's dead?"

"I don't know. Some bad man breezed in and tried to pull off a single-handed jail delivery. He was so fast with a gun that I had to plug him regardless, when I only wanted to wing him. Got him plumb center."

"Sounds like one of the Humphries clan," was Doc's comment. "Let's go have a look at him."

Doc slipped into a black frock coat, his official garment as coroner. When going out in any other capacity, Doc always wore a tan duster.

The black coat sufficed to draw an accompanying crowd. They were joined by Horatio Pheely and his stovepipe hat.

Oggie Simmons was the next to tail along. Simmons was the county commissioner who owned the restaurant and had the contract to furnish meals for prisoners. By the time they reached the jail the party had been reenforced by Pop Crossett, Hank Chalmers the postmaster and perhaps a dozen saloon-porch loungers.

"Know him, Doc?" inquired Pheely, when the body had been turned over, exposing the snarling face and the fingers clenched on the gun.

"No. Do you? How about it, Simmons?"

Both commissioners denied knowledge of the gunman's name.

"Hah!" cackled Pop. "You're a pair of danged liars! You both know—you used to know him years ago. You danged pair of tightwads, tryin' to jigger the sheriff out of the rewards!

"That's Bob Humphries — Snake's brother and right-hand man. They's a county reward of five hundred out for Bob; the Pinkerton Consolidated has another five hundred up; the Eagle Butte Mine values his corpse at two hundred and fifty, and so does the stage company.

"Fifteen hundred dollars! Jee-roo-salem! Sheriff, that sure was makin' money fast."

"Blood money!" sniffed Pheely.

"Blood money, ——!" retorted Pop. "This Bob Humphries has done eight or nine killin's—cold-blooded, most of them. And I know danged well that he's the dirty dog who kidnaped that little dance-hall gal about five year back. Don't forgit that."

"We won't," promised Simmons.

The latter's one political policy was to copper Pheely on everything. Besides, Bill Collier had the earmarks of a real sheriff. For the first time in months Oggie's restaurant was doing some catering, with the bill charged to the county. There were now three regular boarders; there might be more in the future. A little encouragement would cost Oggie nothing and was a good business policy.

"There's a lot of money in the special fund," he continued. "At the next meeting we'll vote that the county reward be paid *pronto*."

Pheely spluttered like a wet hen, realizing that he had started on the wrong foot and that Simmons had taken advantage of it. The voters present seemed to agree with Oggie.

"Bob Humphries!" exclaimed a late arrival, recognizing the dead gunman.

In his voice was amazement and something akin to awe.

"He was the shootenest man in the gang. Cock-eyed coyotes! Shuriff, you must be fast—turrible fast with a Colt."

"Hah!" cackled Pop. "He gits by; he gits by."

The old stage driver hurried away. To be the first to spread the news would be good for free drinks at some of the saloons. The death of the notorious Bob Humphries was the first bit of sunshine in a bandit-clouded land.

IV

FOUR days later Bill Collier stood "at ease" on the porch of his office, one shoulder leaning heavily against a post, one ankle across the other. His lips were moving, but not in prayer. His whole face was moving, for he was exercising half an ounce of fine-cut. When his lips opened it was either to spit tobacco-juice or to cuss Pop's boots. They hurt Bill's feet.

With the exception of the boots he was at peace with the world. He was wondering when a deputy from the adjoining county would show up to get Ace Murphy. With a tolerant eye he gazed across the plaza to the corner where stood Pheely's bank, one of the few two-story buildings in town.

His gaze wandered to a horseman riding into town from the north—therefore from the outside world. The newcomer rode by within thirty feet of the porch and nodded informally to Bill.

He was a stranger, youthful, square-jawed, laughing-eyed, and Irish by the cut of his lip. His mount was a pinto which looked capable of speed and endurance. The double-cinched saddle and "apron" chaps spelled Texas to Bill's knowing eye. In a saddle scabbard was a carbine, and a Colt hung where it could be reached the quickest.

Bill wondered if this capable-looking young man craved action. He appeared to be likely material for a deputy.

Then into the midst of Bill's pleasant frame of mind walked an official joy-killer. From the direction of the bank came Mr. Horatio Pheely, wearing his perennial stovepipe, all the available supply of dignity in a forty-mile radius, and an accusing look, the latter being for the sheriff.

With disfavor Bill watched the approach of Mr. Pheely. He did not like that hat. He regretted his position as sheriff, which prevented his giving way to an impulse to shoot off the hat and keep it jumping with five more shots.

"Now looky here, sheriff," was the opening squeak. "Us taxpayers think you ought to be more on the job. You ought to be out with a posse instead of loafin' here at your office."

"That so?"

Bill spat calmly and shifted the half-ounce to the other cheek.

"You taxpayers are too reckless. Thinking? Huh! That's awful dangerous. First thing you know you'll sprain something, and then your thinking days will be over.

"Posse? Don't make me laugh. I ain't seen any posse material laying around loose. Give me more money for deputies and I'll deliver. I'm a marked man, now that I've got three prisoners. I'm being watched; I don't dare to leave the jail.

"I'm going to raise —— when the board meets again. I'll insist on money for a jailor, enough to make it worth while for one with guts and nerve—he'll need both to keep the prisoners here till the judicial district judge shows up."

"We think——"

"There you go again," interrupted Bill. "I'm the victim around here. I'm getting paid to think. I've been thinking all afternoon."

"You've got an expense account," squeaked Pheely. "Hire some men. Why don't you get busy? Do *something!* It ain't safe to ship a plugged two-bit piece out on the stage. Snake Humphries thinks he owns this county. What's a sheriff for?"

"That's what I've been thinking about."

Bill spat in disgust.

"If Snake thinks he owns the county he oughta have his head examined for wanting

to own it. This county needs a apology for existing more than it needs anything else. It wanted a goat and it got me.

"One hundred a month for deputies! No wonder business has gone to ——, with a short-sighted policy like that. And wanting me to hire a jailor out of that hundred. Tax-collector in season, and town marshal, that's what you want, or at least what you pay for. Not a sheriff. Good men come high.

"Wait till I cash in some reward money. I'll hire some bang-up deputies out of my own pocket—bring them in from the outside. It will be a business investment with me. But right now—leave these prisoners without a guard? Uh-huh! I stay right here."

"The board will have something to say——"

"Go ahead," jeered Bill. "Your last elected sheriff got planted because he had more guts than sense. The last one you appointed quit cold—and I don't blame him. Maybe he wasn't gun-shy, but you sure left him shy of everything else. No wonder he got disgusted. It's harder to fight you and the board of commissioners than it is to fight bandits.

"I was broke when I landed here, and the board took advantage of that. They wished the job on to me. I'm no quitter, so I'm hanging on. I've got to maintain my reputation for sticking till a job is finished."

Mr. Pheely took this under consideration, registering thoughtfulness by absently stroking his ragged Van Dyke and slanting a vacant stare at the sky.

Sput-crash! An unannounced bullet arrived on the scene—a heavy chunk of lead which knocked off the shiny hat and then smashed a window in the sheriff's office, with an accompanying tinkle of falling glass. The cherished hat lay in the dust, its virgin beauty marred forever by a jagged half-inch rent clear across the flat crown. Faintly came the report of a rifle.

Bill calmly remained propped against the post. He spat again and centered his gaze on the nearest foot-hills, half a mile distant. He marked the spot where the smoke of black powder thinned away.

"That's one of the things I was thinking about," he announced, grinning at Pheely's dismay. "It's getting —— annoying. Rotten shooting, at that. Missed me six feet. No allowance for windage at a seven-eight hundred yard range."

He grinned again and walked into the office.

Pheely ruefully examined his wrecked hat, meanwhile casting frequent and fearful glances toward the frowning hills.

"From a big Sharps, just as I thought," volunteered Bill, stepping from the office. On his palm he carried a battered piece of lead.

"Went through the window and flattened out against that law-book. Dented —— out of the book and knocked it clear across the room. Too bad about your hat. Six inches lower and you wouldn't be worrying a bit about it."

Bill kept a straight face and again leaned nonchalantly against the post.

Spat! A heavy bullet smacked into the wood a scant inch from his shoulder. He jumped, looked at his upper arm and rubbed it investigatingly. Then he saw the hole in the post.

"Suffering sand-fleas! Got jarred so's at first I thought I'd been plugged. Today's the first day they've taken more than one shot. I——"

But Mr. Pheely, his cherished cloak of dignity altogether lost, strayed or misplaced, was almost hidden by the dust he was raising as he streaked towards the safety of the brick bank.

"Not a bad idea at that," thought Bill. "It ain't *too* healthy here."

Locking the office door, he headed down the street.

In his mind was the intention of looking up the alert, youthful stranger who had ridden into town less than half an hour previously. He saw the pinto cayuse standing at the hitching rail outside the Maverick Saloon. Bill reached to push in one of the swinging doors.

Bang-whang-bang! From within resounded three pistol-shots which almost blended into one. Bill recoiled involuntarily from the door, then pulled his Colt and leaped inside.

At the bar stood the young stranger, one elbow leaning easily on the near-mahogany, in his hand a smoking Colt with which he menaced the two other visible occupants of the room. Flat on his face on the sanded floor lay Shady Bowen, the professional bully and bad-man.

McCann's face appeared cautiously from

behind the bar. The stranger caught sight of Bill's gun. Up went his Colt, thumb on the hammer, ready to throw down. Then he noted the sheriff's badge.

"Hello, sheriff," was his offhand greeting. "He started something and I just naturally had to finish it."

With his weapon he indicated the body on the floor.

"It was him or me. Ask the barkeep."

"He sure finished it," was McCann's verdict. "This kid stands Bowen's rough stuff for a while, then calls his bluff to a fare-ye-well, and calls him a lot of other things, too. He tells Shady just what he thinks of him, which was plenty and a little more. He's sure got a gift for usin' plumb harrowin' words. Then he deliberately turns his back.

"I think the kid's a goner, for Shady pulls. But the kid beats him to it. Shoots from under his armpit—through the bottom of his shoulder holster. Shady's only shot goes into the floor. The kid shoots again."

"I watched him in the bar mirror," explained the youth. "He was right spang behind me, and I couldn't miss. I just looked over my left shoulder and cut loose as his gun came out. I couldn't take chances. I've seen his kind before."

"Yes," said Bill, taking the other's gun, "and I've seen your kind before. You're under arrest."

He marched his prisoner to the jail. Carefully behind them he closed the office door.

"Have a chair," was his cordial invitation. "Here's your gun."

He laid it on the table, along with a bag of tobacco and a book of cigaret-papers.

"Help yourself. You're not under arrest."

"What in blazes was the idea? You're a funny kind of sheriff."

"You're in the same kind of a county, that's the idea," grinned Bill. "Between ourselves, you're now a deputy sheriff of Pinkerton County, and I don't want anybody else in town to know it. Raise your right hand."

"You work a bit sudden," laughed the other. "But you can swear me in if you want to. My name's Sheehy—Jack Sheehy. That's my real name, in case anybody wants to know. I'm from the Panhandle, and I didn't leave because I had to."

"Oh, you've already furnished references," said Bill. "Bumping off Shady Bowen is plenty of them. As I said, I don't want anybody to know you're a deputy. I've got a little job for you tomorrow. Some sniper lays over in the hills every day and tries to improve his long-range shooting, with me as a target. You're to go over there tonight, hide out and bring him in."

Bill pointed through the window.

"See that patch of juniper? His favorite sniping-perch is in the rocks among the brush a little to the left of that—twenty or thirty feet maybe. You'll go over while it's dark, for he may get scared if he sees you moseying in that direction."

"Leave him to me," said the new deputy. "That sniper will be my meat when I Injun up on him. Any rewards to be cut?"

"Uh-huh!" said Bill promptly. "I want a distinct understanding about that. I'll pay you one hundred dollars a month, and I'm paying that out of my own pocket—out of reward money."

"That's good pay—blamed big pay," conceded the other, "but I'd kinda like to gamble a little. Less money and a cut at rewards."

"Not a chance," said Bill with finality. "On the reward money we're a closed corporation—Dick Atchison and me."

"Dick Atchison!" whooped Sheehy. "Why, I'm here because he telegraphed me to meet him in Pinkerton City! I inquired in some of the saloons, but no one knew him. Is he in town?"

"Not yet. I wrote him, but he never answered. What did he say in the telegram?"

"Nothing except to meet him here. That was enough for me."

"This is getting good," grinned Bill. "I sent for Dick. He wires you to come along, and then I pick you for a deputy before he shows up. I'm Bill Collier."

"Sergeant Collier, of the Rangers? Man, this *is* getting good. I joined up with the Rangers just after you resigned. I heard some yarns about your stunts down in the Big Bend. I quit the Rangers last month."

"Why?"

"For the same reason you did," laughed Sheehy. "They say you quit because things were getting too tame. Now what's the layout here? Pinkerton has a rep that's spread clear over into Texas."

Bill painstakingly rolled a cigaret.

"I guess you ain't heard half of it, at

that," he said at last, and then proceeded to sketch what he knew of Snake Humphries.

"McCann, who owns the Maverick down the street, tells me that he knows for a fact that Snake offers his men two hundred a month if they want steady wages, or a percentage of the cash taken in the raids each man goes on. They cover about seven counties in four States and Territories. They stick up a bank or a train and then duck back to Pinkerton where they can't be reached.

"A narrow ledge is the only path into the cañon where they hide out, and on that ledge two or three men could stop a hundred. Guards are there day and night.

"Now from what I've heard of this ledge, I figure it's going to work *for me* as well as it's worked for the gang. We can stop them from coming out. They've got a big flat for their horses to graze on, some cabins and more or less of a big supply of grub. They get most of the grub by sending gangs down to raid wagons which freight supplies from the railroad into Pinkerton City and the mines. Maybe we can't starve them out, but we'll have them eating their horses before we get through."

"About that ledge thing," interjected Sheehy. "Suppose a gang comes back from a raid while we're holding the ledge. We'll be caught between two gangs which outnumber us badly, and things might get too hot to handle."

"I've thought of that," returned Bill. "I've got a couple of aces up my sleeve."

Pause. Bill rolled another cigaret, then continued:

"It's a cinch that Humphries has spies here in town to tip him off when bullion from the mines goes out on the stage. I'd bet a lot that Shady Bowen was one of them. I'll spot the others sooner or later. That will help."

"You said you were going to pay me a hundred a month out of your own pocket," said Sheehy. "Doesn't the county pay?"

"Sure. A hundred a month, but I'd use that up by taking out one posse. About all I get is abuse instead of money. I'm doing the county a favor by holding down the job of sheriff, and it ain't appreciated worth a ——. They've been riding me with spurs on, and I'm getting ready to buck good and plenty.

"See that picture gallery on the wall? As near as I've figured it up, the county will be stuck for about eighteen thousand clinking pieces of silver if we make a clean-up of the gang. I'll make them pay it, even if they have to put out a special bond issue. I'll take a lot of or'nary joy in making it *my* turn to use spurs.

"And those outside rewards. It's an even-money bet that we'll find half of those wanted men in Snake's gang. Sweet pickings! Snake himself is worth pretty close to eight thousand. There's ten different rewards out for him, posted by the state, county, railroad, express company, stage line and five mining corporations.

"He ought to feel slighted because the U. S. Government ignores him. The reason there's no Federal reward offered is because Snake has been wise enough to let the mails strictly alone. That's one reason he's had things his own way for so long. To get a U. S. marshal on his trail, with the power to call in a few troops of cavalry, has cut short the career of many a bandit. Snake's too wise to stick a finger in the buzz-saw."

"He's wise about letting the mails alone," agreed Sheehy. "Wonder when Dick'll show up? He ought——"

Footsteps sounded hollowly on the porch. Bill reached for his gun, an example followed by Sheehy. After peering cautiously through the window, Bill unlocked the door. He was slightly gun-shy since the visit paid by Bob Humphries.

Hank Chalmers, the postmaster-telegraph-operator, entered, puffing hard from exertion and excitement.

"Sheriff, the wire's been cut again. To me that means just one thing: Snake's gang has robbed a train somewhere over the Colorado line and are headin' back here. They always cut the wire when they do that."

"Sounds likely," nodded Sheehy.

"Good tip, Chalmers, I'll act on it. Thanks!" said Bill. "I'll mosey up the road to the top of the pass and look things over. How long might it take them to ride back?"

"Mebbe seven hours—if they ride hard. Do I get some of the reward money if I've made a good guess at what's bein' pulled off?"

"How much do you think you're entitled to?"

"Mebbe fifty dollars—I need that much to send to my sister next month."

"You'll sure get the fifty—if I collect."

"Thanks, sheriff."

Chalmers hastened away. He was Bill's friend for life.

"We both go, don't we?" inquired Sheehy.

"We don't," said Bill. "Three of those cells in there hold twenty-five hundred dollars' worth of bad man. That much sure money is worth watching. A deputy from Gallup may show up to take away the prisoner in cell number two. You stay here, keep the keys and turn him over if some one shows up with the proper papers. And you're to go over and hide out in the hills before daylight."

"If I do that," objected Sheehy, "the jail will be left unguarded anyway, so I might as well go with you. Can't you find some one to take charge here?"

"By golly, yes. Never thought of it before. Pop Crossett ain't doing a thing till the stage pulls out in the morning. I can trust him, and he'll be a fighting fool if you put him behind a locked door. I hope we'll be back before daylight, and you can grab a little sleep in the juniper patch while you wait for the sniper to come along."

"Sein' that I don't snore, I reckon I can," smiled Sheehy.

Bill went out in search of Pop Crossett and found him playing cribbage with Hank Chalmers. Pop did not want to leave the post-office. It was a blood feud—two bits a game—he explained. Bill removed the game, cards, board and players, to the jail. The postmaster's daughter would attend to any late callers for mail.

From the rack Pop took two rifles, shoved the magazines full of shells and announced that he was ready for war. Bill and his deputy departed. Pop dropped the bars into place inside the door and placed the rifles across one side of the table. He pushed the deck of cards to the postmaster.

"It's your deal, Hank," he announced.

THREE hours later found the officers approaching the summit of Six-Horse Pass.

"Here's where Snake's gang usually stick up the stage," explained Bill. "It's a cinch for them. From the top of the grade they can watch the road for ten miles on both sides. It's a made-to-order place for a holdup."

Bill was cautious. He and Sheehy dismounted, tied their horses in the brush a few yards from the road and walked to the summit. Below them to the north lay Rawhide Valley. Far beyond arose the buttes and mesas of the Grebenau Hills. The Colorado line intersected these, and beyond them lay the railroad. Far to the north, rendered almost invisible by distance and the background of dust-covered brush on the distant hills, streamed an ever moving cloud of dust.

"Chalmers knew something!" exclaimed Bill. "That's a bunch of horses traveling fast. Snake's gang. But it'll take them about three hours to get here."

"It'll be dark by then," said Sheehy. "But that'll be all the better. We've got an awful crust—two of us jumping a dozen or so. How about stretching my riata across the road between two trees? Low down, to trip the horses. Between the spill and our shooting, the gang may get rattled and cut for the hills. The best we can hope for is to grab what's left behind. If they stop to shoot it out we'll have more than we can handle."

"Maybe!" grunted Bill. "I want daylight. I want to grab the plunder they're carrying. We'll shoot down the horses carrying the loot. If any rider gets pinned down by a fallen bronc, so much the better. Surprize is the element I'm depending on; those who can will scatter into the hills when we cut loose. They won't come over the pass anyway. They'll cut through the cañons lower down and go that way to their fort. We'll ride down and lay for them where I figure they'll turn off the road."

They regained their horses and tightened the cinches, and for half an hour rode down-grade on the northern approach to Six-Horse Pass. The road was extremely narrow and winding and was covered with three inches or so of choking red dust which partly concealed some of the innumerable chuck-holes.

The dust-screen to the northward had passed from sight. Therefore the officers knew that their own dust could not be seen by the outlaws.

Bill finally pulled up his mount.

"Right around the next curve is where the gang usually cuts through a cañon and over the mountains to the head of Buzzard Creek."

Again they tied their horses in the brush, then walked down the road. They took

pains to leave the slightest possible signs of footprints by walking at the extreme edge. Bill had taken into consideration the possibility of a scout traveling a short distance ahead of the gang to warn them of anything suspicious.

Two hundred yards down the road the officers rounded a sharp curve and saw a plainly marked trail leading off toward the top of a ridge to the east.

"That's their private trail," Bill pointed out. "Pop Crossett called my attention to it. I rode down here the other day and up the trail until I sighted one of the gang's lookouts. He was on a pinnacle that can be spotted by the three piñons at the summit. I was getting close to their fort. About ten miles from here, as near as I can make it. The other way, around the other side of the mountains, it must be about a three or four hour ride from Pinkerton City.

"But that lookout saw me at the same time I saw him, so I turned back. What I saw of the country tallies with what the old-timers told me about it."

At the head of the turn in the road, among the rocks and well concealed by brush, they found an ambush and settled down to wait. The trail was not over twenty-five yards from the muzzles of their guns.

Passed an hour and half. Two horsemen finally rode into sight from the north.

"Scouts!" whispered Bill.

The riders came to the trail and pulled up to wait. Both were large in physique, bold, hard in appearance. As they waited they rolled cigarets.

Seven more horsemen rode into sight. The scouts glanced carelessly around, then urged their horses into the trail.

The seven horses were less than one hundred yards away. Leading them, astride a black stallion, rode a dapper blond youth, his silver-ornamented beaver hat pushed back from his forehead. A red handkerchief of silk kept the dust from the neck of his lustrous black-satin shirt. His vest was of white calfskin. Unbuttoned, it flapped open, revealing two Colts in shoulder holsters.

"That's Jimmy Barstow on the stallion," excitedly whispered Sheehy. "Jimmy the Kid! He's wanted in Texas. He looks like mama's pride, but he's a cross between a side-winder and a bear-trap. Shall I wing him?"

"No, not unless he shows fight. Shoot his horse. He's carrying the loot—those sacks across his fork. We'll both shoot first at the stallion, so he'll drop in his tracks. We'll make sure of the plunder. There'll be reward for that."

Jimmy the Kid was within twenty yards of the trail and not more than fifty from the officers, when from one of the concealed horses two hundred yards up the road came a shrill whinny. Then another from the second animal as one of the outlaw's mounts responded.

Bill swore beneath his breath.

"*Shoot!*" he ordered, thrusting the barrel of his rifle over the top of a rock.

Sheehy cut loose with his carbine a scant half-second ahead of Bill. Down went the stallion. Immediately three of the gang opened up with their Colts, blazing away at the smoke of the first two reports. Bill's rifle jammed as he tried to pump in another shell. He pulled his six-gun and fired twice.

A yell had come from one of the gang, and they had spurred into the brush.

Out leaped the officers from behind the smoke of their guns. They started running down the road to the trail. Bill's hat flew off as Jimmy the Kid, pinned down with one leg under the dead stallion, opened fire. Sheehy's carbine spoke, and the Kid flopped back into the dust.

Out from the brush leaped a squealing, bucking calico mare. She hit the road, sunfished and abruptly pitched. The rider grabbed leather. Both officers ran forward, guns ready. The mare pulled off another swift pinwheel act; the saddle slid beneath her belly, spilling the rider into the road on his head.

"That's an argument in favor of double cinches!" laughed Sheehy as he disarmed and handcuffed the dazed outlaw. "Hear them go! The rest of the gang are hitting it for the high places. They didn't expect opposition, and we might be a whole army for all they know."

"Hope they don't take it into their heads to come back to investigate," said Bill soberly. "If it comes to brush-fighting, outnumbered over three to one, we'll be children of misfortune. I have an idea I'll raise a crop of gooseflesh and a lot of dust toward Pinkerton."

"Me, too," agreed Sheehy, catching the bridle of the calico mare.

The latter stood in a dejected attitude, forelegs spread wide. Apparently she was puzzled at the phenomenom of a saddle where the cinch should be.

Bill knelt to examine Jimmy the Kid.

"You had a coarse bead on him," he announced to Sheehy. "You opened up four inches of his scalp, but he'll come around. These smooth-faced guys are generally hard-headed."

Bill proceeded to wrap his bandanna around the bleeding scalp.

Sheehy, leading the mare, marched his prisoner down the road to Bill. He made the prisoner lie flat on his back. He kept an eye on him while assisting Bill to drag the Kid's ankle from beneath the dead stallion. The heavy stirrup had saved the kid from broken bones.

Sheehy next worked to adjust the saddle on the mare. The prisoner watched him, his attitude apathetic but his flow of profanity fervent and whole-hearted. He voiced emphatic opinions as to where all mares, particularly calico mares, should be sent.

He likewise touched high spots of oratory concerning rattlesnakes. The mare, plunging through the brush, had come upon several rattlesnakes. They were her pet fear. One snake would have been bad enough, but a flock of them turned her wild-eyed crazy with fear. In a frenzy she had reared, pivoted and bucked her way back to the road despite efforts to control her.

"Tough luck," commented Sheehy, pulling tight the latigo until the now calm mare reached around and tried to nip his shoulder.

"Let's load him into the saddle."

Bill pointed to the Kid.

About twenty minutes later when Jimmy the Kid regained consciousness he found himself in the mare's saddle. His feet were tied in the stirrups. He was handcuffed and held in the saddle by some one's arms around him. The some one was the other prisoner, "Red" Caplan, who sat behind the saddle, his hands linked together in front of the Kid. On the chain between Red's shackles was snapped another handcuff, the other end of which was locked on the saddle horn. His ankles were securely bound to the outside of the stirrups.

Red had profanely protested that he was tied up like a Christmas gift. Bill had admitted it, and then inquired—

"Ain't it a lulu of a job?"

Sheehy rode ahead. To his saddle was fastened the mare's bridle-reins. Jimmy the Kid opened his eyes and in bewilderment momentarily studied Sheehy's square shoulders and back. He managed to twist his head and saw Bill Collier riding behind as rear-guard. Across the front of Bill's saddle hung the two gunnysacks containing the proceeds of the train-robbery.

The Kid started to speak, but the effort caused his aching head to hurt worse than ever. Wearily he again leaned back against his fellow captive.

POP CROSSETT and the postmaster had placed a lantern on the table and by its light were continuing their interminable cribbage feud. They grumbled when Bill took the lantern to light the new prisoners to their cells. When the lantern was returned they calmly continued their game. Bill shuffled a few steps in burlesque of a war-dance.

"Chalmers, you sure get your fifty!" he whooped.

"That's good," grunted the other. "This old kyard-sharp is six bits ahead of me."

"Aw, Hank's mad clear through," gloated Pop. "He may insult me by calling me old, but brains will tell—brains will tell. He's got all the luck and I've got all the science."

"I have some loose cash," suggested Sheehy. "Let's eat."

"I guess we can afford to," smiled Bill. "The pickings was good today. Let's go."

They headed for Oggie Simmons' "eatatorium."

Half an hour later they returned. Tied to the veranda-posts were now five horses instead of three.

"What the ——?" wondered Bill. "The jail seems to be getting popular."

He tiptoed across the porch and peered through the window. The two old-timers sat intent on their game. Bill tried the door. It was locked.

Pop opened it in response to a hail.

"Got yuh two more prisoners!" he yelped exultingly. "We forgot to lock the door and they walked right in on us. I had a Winchester on the table pointin' right at the door. I jest cocked it and stuck them up. Hank took their guns, then we shoved them in a cell."

"You're certainly there, Pop," complimented Bill. "But there's a catch in it

somewhere; it was too easy. Didn't they try to put up a fight?"

"No-o. But they kinda laughed. A couple of minutes after I locked them up they was both snorin'."

"Let's have a look at them."

Bill took the lantern and keys. Followed by the others, he entered the cell and put the light on the faces of the sleepers, who lay like sardines in the lower bunk. A look at the first one was enough; in fact, it was too much.

Bill managed to put the lantern on the floor. Weakly he leaned back against the bars and howled with laughter. The prisoner was his old friend, Dick Atchison.

The laughter awoke Atchison. He sat up blinking.

"Hello, Dick," laughed Bill. "Ain't it a regular jail?"

"The jail's all right," was the grinning reply, "but that forlorn old walrus out in front sure acts officious when he's got a finger wrapped around the trigger of a heavy Winchester."

Atchison sat up on the iron cot and shook hands with Bill.

"And this is Sam Phillips," he introduced his companion, who was still sleeping.

He poked Sam in the stomach.

"Ugh!"

Sam awoke suddenly, pulled up both feet and pushed Atchison on to the floor.

"Dog-gone it! Don't hit me in the belly. I'm touchy there. It's empty."

At that moment, still seated on the floor, Dick caught sight of Sheehy.

"Hello, Bud!" he yelled. "Glad you got here."

A slight pause and a malicious grin.

"How's that little widow in El Paso?"

"You go to ——!" retorted Sheehy, reaching down for a handshake and jerking Atchison to his feet. "Your friend doesn't know he has been introduced."

"Oh, Sam," jerking his thumb towards the cot. "He's one of us. He's got plenty of nerve. Sometimes he even shows signs of brains. Sam, be proud to meet Bill Collier."

Pop Crossett edged forward.

"Mebbe I was a mite officious," he apologized, "but you didn't tell me who you be."

"Good Lord! Yuh didn't give us time to!" snorted Phillips. "Yuh shoved us in here so fast that we must have looked like a coupled of ground-squirrels diving into a hole."

He grinned.

"We didn't care. We've been riding for a week after we reached southern Colorado on a train. Yesterday afternoon we struck what looked like a soft poker game. It wasn't. But it took all night to break us, and we've been riding since daylight.

"We figured that the first grub would be here. We sure needed sleep, too. Yuh gave us an early chance for that."

"I had an idee you might be two of the Humphries gang," explained Pop. "I wa'n't takin' chances. You looked tough."

"We felt that way," put in Atchison. "But if we'd been gunning for you we'd have potted you through the window. There 're bars on it, but you left the blind up."

"I did not," denied Pop. "I yanked it down, tongue, traces and trees. The danged thing stuck, and I yanked too hard."

"Well, Bill, now that I'm here what do we do?" inquired Atchison.

"Eat, I hope," answered Sam. "Who's got some money? They sure licked us in that poker game."

"I guess Oggie's place is still open," said Bill. "Sheehy will fork over. He's the capitalist of the crowd."

With a five-dollar bill the hungry pair hurried away to the restaurant. Bill and Sheehy took the horses over to the Pinkerton Feed and Livery Stable. Then Sheehy announced his intention to turn in. They were back in the sheriff's office. Pop and Chalmers had ceased to play.

"Three cots and four men," said Sheehy. "Reckon I'd better spread my blankets here in the office. I'm getting up before daylight. Wish I had an alarm clock."

"Bunk over in my shack," invited Pop. "My alarm clock is allus set for three-thutty. I gits up then every mornin'."

"Made to order," smiled Sheehy. "Will be glad to bunk with you."

"Come along," said Pop. "That old crib hound, Hank Chalmers, kept me up scandalously late. It's nigh nine-thutty now."

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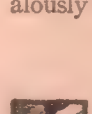

AT NOON the following day Sheehy brought in a prisoner and a Sharps rifle.

"Know him?" he asked Bill, shoving forward the captive.

"My gosh, yes! It's Jake Humphries, the bank-robber I trailed in here from San Miguel. Why the scowl, Jake? You don't seem to like me."

"I'll like yuh a lot better when I'm lookin' at yuh from behind a Colt," growled Jake. "Maybe I'll have better luck than I've had with a rifle—so far."

Bill said nothing. He was sizing up the prisoner. In San Miguel County he had paid little attention to Jake, had simply placed him in the pig-faced, blustering classification and let it go at that. He had possessed no reasons and no desire to waste time on him. Now he looked at Jake from a new angle.

In a way Bill was a student of human nature, and knew how to handle men. Offhand, without thinking much about it, he knew that none of the other prisoners would talk. Jake was different, however. A properly applied third degree would cause Jake to bluster—he was that kind of man—and in his blustering he might spill valuable information.

"I'll agree that he was out of luck," grinned Sheehy. "He was lining up the sights on the Sharps on you when I stuck my Colt against the back of his neck. He drew in his head like a turtle when he felt the cold metal."

Jake sneered. Malice and contempt shined in his piggy little eyes.

"You poor fools!" he blurted out. "Your graves are as good as filled."

"They haven't been dug yet," returned Bill, "and as for filling—we'll see how near you come to filling one of the best cells in this jail. What a rabbit you were to let yourself get caught that way!" Bill deliberately baited Jake. This might make him talk where nothing else would.

"Yah!" snarled Jake. "You'll be the rabbit. When a sheriff in this county tries to do more than draw his pay he's on the way to the private graveyard that my cousin keeps for smart-aleck sheriffs."

"Yes?" scoffed Bill. "When I stick Snake Humphries in a cell I'll tell him what a bloomer you were. I could cork up your brain in an empty Colt cartridge and use it for a rattle. Now you'll have a chance to study out what jails are made for."

"Yuh can't keep me in this jail for twenty-four hours."

"No? I've got four of the gang in it now. Some of them have been here for a week?"

"That's because Snake's been away. He's due back tonight, then see where yuh get off. He'll ride in with fifty men and pull this jail apart."

"Good, ain't he?" drawled Bill. "All he needs is a soap-box and a poor idea. He sucks wind like a knot-hole in a swinging barn door."

"All wrong," laughed Sheehy. "You can shut the door. Lock him up and let's go eat. Where's Dick and Sam?"

"Still sleeping. They ain't caught up yet."

"Phillips' nickname is 'Sleepy.' Hope Dick ain't catching the habit from him."

"You'll all be caught sleeping," was Jake's parting shot as he was led to a cell.

"Maybe."

Bill slammed the corridor door to lock it as he stepped back into the office.

"I got your drift," said Sheehy. "You worked him pretty. What do you make of it? Think Snake will try a jail delivery, or was that just wind?"

"I don't know—yet. He got away with one the last time this county had a sheriff who was on the job. That was six years ago. The sheriff sat eating over in Oggie's place. Some one stuck the muzzle of a Colt into his ear and pulled the trigger. It made an awful mess.

"Sixteen men rode up to this jail and made the deputy turn over the keys. Snake wouldn't let his men kill the deputy. It tickled his sense of humor to spread-eagle the deputy with handcuffs to the bars inside a cell, lock the cell on him and then bung up the lock so's it couldn't be opened. It took a blacksmith all day to get him out. Half the men in town went into the hills after the gang, but Snake reached his hide-out and stood them off.

"Aw, let's go eat," insisted Sheehy. "Dump over those cots to awaken the sleeping beauties and tell them to come along."

Later in the afternoon Sheehy again brought up the question of whether or not Snake Humphries might attempt to release the imprisoned members of his gang. Sheehy was afraid—afraid that Humphries would *not* try it. Bill only laughed and said:

"The only way we can find out is to wait. I have a scheme and a plan of defense."

He proceeded in detail to outline it. The three deputies listened with growing admiration.

"Bill, you're a genius!" declared Atchison.

"You're a blamed liar!" retorted Bill heatedly. "Also insulting. A genius is a guy with dirty long hair and a sad look."

"I apologize," grinned Dick. "You don't qualify at all. You've got short, sad hair and a dirty look."

"If you fellows are through with that half-witted stuff," said Phillips, "let's get started."

"Not till dark," returned Bill. "Snake may have spies in town. We don't want him tipped off. We'll be outnumbered over ten to one maybe—so if the gang comes, let them ride into a trap. That cross-fire will sicken them plenty."

"No such luck," growled Sheehy. "I'll bet they don't come."

So they whiled away the afternoon. At four o'clock a deputy sheriff arrived from Gallup. He led an extra horse and had papers for Ace Murphy.

"Our commissioners meet next Tuesday," he announced to Bill. "They'll vote you that thousand bucks, and the voucher will be sent over *pronto* by mail. We're sure glad to get Ace. There's seven indictments against him. Everything from murder to mayhem and from breaking into a bank to breaking out of jail."

"Better stick around till tomorrow," suggested Bill. "Rest up a while. You've had a hard trip."

"No. I gotta get back. I'll feed my face while the horses are feeding, then I'll start."

"Have it your own way," said Bill. "But if I was in Rome I'd be willing to eat spaghetti."

"Meaning what?"

"I'd be willing to listen to good advice. Better wait till dark anyway before starting. Otherwise you might lose your prisoner and your reputation along with him. And if you do, you'd better lose yourself, for you'll sure lose your scalp if I ever meet up with you again."

The officer laughed.

"Don't worry about me. I know what I'm doing."

An hour later as he rode away with his prisoner he looked back toward the group in front of the jail, laughed again and waved his hand cheerily.

"That guy seems to have a big private joke," voiced Atchison. "Strikes me there's something wrong."

"Hope Snake doesn't stick him up and let Ace get away," said Bill. "I'd hate to lose that thousand."

Bill looked north along the road.

"Pop's late tonight," he finally remarked. "He generally gets here long before this. I can't even see any dust. We can always tell when he pulls out of the cañon three miles from here."

TEN minutes passed. A moving cloud of dust arose from the mouth of the cañon. The stage was coming. Half-way to the cañon was the dust-screen kicked up by the two horses ridden by the outside deputy and his prisoner.

Finally the stage swung around the curve and headed for the plaza. In front of the jail Pop jammed on the brake and pulled up the horses. Usually he drove on to the stable.

"Stuck up again comin' in," he yelled. "The gang looked over my three passengers, then rode with me down into Oven Cañon. They made me wait there till one of the gang rides in from to'ards town. He says—

" 'They're comin'—alone.'

" 'Hump along, Pop,' says one of the gang, 'and tell that new sheriff that he's a —— —— fool.'

"That's what he told me to tell you. There's somethin' danged funny goin' on. They was all laughin' over somethin'. And then I passes Ace Murphy. How'd he get out of jail?"

"A deputy came to take him over to Gallup."

"Deputy, ——!" shorted Pop. "That was one of the gang was ridin' with Ace. I reckernized him. They both laughed as I drove by."

"A guy with a black Stetson?" queried Bill, a sudden feeling of emptiness in his stomach.

"That's him. He's been with the gang for years."

"But he wore a star. He had the papers from the sheriff of McKinley County. He——"

"He took you in proper!" exclaimed Pop. "No wonder they was laughin'."

Bill dropped weakly to a sitting posture on the edge of the porch.

"My ——! Those papers were all right. The gang must have stuck up the real deputy."

"That's a cinch," put in Atchison.

"And that was Snake's idee of a joke," supplied Pop. "He sent one of his gang in with the papers. He must 'a' worked it slick."

"He did," groaned Bill. "I swallowed everything. Why shouldn't I? I been expecting a deputy to drop in any day."

"Wonder what happened to the deputy?" inquired Phillips.

"Ten to one he got bumped off," said Pop. "They don't bother with prisoners—except women sometimes. That depity is layin' dead out in the brush somewhere. It ain't no use to look for him till the buzzards gather.

"I'll say this for the gang: They won't let a wounded man lay around and suffer. Either that depity's got a whole skin or he's dead. When they shoots they shoots to kill."

Pop drove on toward the stable.

For a time there was silence. In turn Bill looked at each of his deputies.

"I guess—Pop's right," he said at last slowly. "I'm worried about the officer who left Gallup with the papers. But worrying does no good. You know how I feel. I'd like to start out and look for him. But they might have stuck him up two or three days ago. They might have taken him 'way off in the hills and shot him.

"We stay right here. The gang, the chances are, is layin' up in the cañon waitin' for me. They hope I'll ride out to start something. I'll fool them."

"To stay here is best," agreed Atchison. "We'd only ride into a trap."

"Let's eat," suggested Phillips.

"Go ahead," said Bill glumly. "Me, I've kinda lost my appetite. My pride's hurt."

"Pride or pocketbook?" queried Atchison.

"Both! —— it!" growled Bill. "A million in the first, a thousand in the last."

AT NINE o'clock that evening the four officers behind drawn shades sat in the jail office. In low tones they discussed their plan of action in the event of a raid. They agreed with Bill's plan.

"We'll start now," said Bill. "Sam, you'll stay here. Sheehy will rout out the feed-store owner and get all the empty grain-sacks available. Dick, you'll go to both livery stables and do the same. Any kind of sacks will do. I'll get Pheely out of bed and make him unlock the bank. Oh, yes, I'll get a couple of shovels and wheelbarrows out of his big store. Let's go."

Bill started for the door, then stopped at the sound of a low knock. Atchison looked at Bill, then lifted the lantern from the table, quickly turned it low, and placed it on the floor near the door opening.

Sam and Sheehy drew their Colts and stepped inside the sleeping-room. Bill likewise pulled his Colt. Atchison walked back to be behind the door as it swung open.

Bill unlocked the door. A moment of suspense. He jerked it open, keeping the heavy portal between himself and whoever might be outside.

A woman hastily walked into the lantern-light.

"Shut the door—quick!" she said breathlessly.

Bill slammed and locked it. Atchison turned up the lantern to give a better light. A moment later the four men were gathered around.

Bill recognized her as the dance-hall singer. She looked at each man, then spoke to Bill.

"I heard two men talking tonight, and I thought you ought to know. I quit early and came here—around through the vacant lots.

"One of the men was 'Chug' McKenzie, the gambler. He runs the wheel in the Bonanza when anybody wants to buck it. I recognized his voice. I don't know the other man; at least not by his voice. I didn't see them. They were in one of those curtained-off boxes.

" 'You'll have to come,' this man said to Chug. 'Snake wants to muster full strength.'

"Chug didn't want to go. He said so. The other man insisted.

" 'Listen,' he said, 'you've outlived your usefulness here to the gang. You might as well come in and get a good stake, and then breeze to Nevada if you don't want to stay with us.

" 'Snake thinks the bank is full of gold. They haven't been shipping any of it out lately. We'll bust the bank wide open. There's likely to be four or five thousand in it for each of us. You'll get your split if you come with us. Snake says he's got it planned so there won't be any opposition at all.'

"McKenzie said he'd come, and asked where he'd meet Snake. The other man told McKenzie that he'd show him. Tomorrow morning, I think, is the time."

The men looked at each other. Bill was serious. Two of them smiled. Sheehy laughed.

"By golly, Bill, you won't have to change your plans at all. The only difference it makes is that we'll hurry up with them."

Sheehy turned and stared at the girl. She was dressed simply as she had been the first time Bill had seen her.

Bill was looking directly at the flame of the lantern.

"There's some pretty good gun-fighters in this town," he said slowly. "I'm thinking of swearing some of them in."

"Don't do it," begged Atchison. "You may pick the wrong man. There may be other under-cover members of the gang in town. If you make a mistake and pick one of them he'll fan out of here to warn Snake.

"We can't do better with your scheme with a dozen more men. Play it safe. The four of us can handle the gang, the way you've got it figured out. We get the jump on them and shoot their plans to pieces when we cut loose. We'll get plenty of help when the town wakes up."

"Have it your own way," said Bill, smiling. "I was thinking that you boys might want help at the start."

He turned to the girl.

"I want to thank you, Miss—Miss——"

"Fowler," she supplied.

"Miss Fowler," said Bill.

"I couldn't do otherwise than warn you," she said. "And after learning that Chug, of all people—I knew him quite well—was in with the bandits, I didn't know whom to trust. So I came myself. If you'll turn the lantern out I'll slip down the Buzzard Creek road and then cut back across the fields to where I live. I don't want any one to see me."

"I'll see you home, Miss Fowler, with your permission."

Sheehy was all eagerness.

"I'll—I'll be glad to have you, but I'm going home the roundabout way anyhow."

Sheehy glanced questioningly at Bill.

"Go to it," said Bill, "but hurry back. Come down the main street and across the plaza to the feed-store. The proprietor sleeps in the rear room."

The light was turned down. The girl and Sheehy tiptoed out and headed for the Buzzard Creek road, which lay to the left and less than one hundred feet from the jail.

"Come on, Dick," said Bill. "It's the livery stables for yours. I'm going to wake up Pheely and throw such a scare into him that he'll give me action in getting what I want."

Half an hour later Bill and Sheehy were pushing two wheelbarrows filled with sand from the bed of Buzzard Creek. Bill was in the lead.

"Hey, Bill, did you notice her eyes?" was Sheehy's irrelevant query.

"Whose?" grunted Bill as the wheelbarrow struck heavy going.

"Miss Fowler's. Who else's do you suppose I meant, you poor heathen?" snapped Sheehy.

"What about them?" Bill threw back over his shoulder.

"They're wonderful. She reminds me of an angel."

"Yes," laughed Bill. "That's what I thought the first time I saw her. But she sings in a dance hall. That was enough for me."

"You're a —— fool!" retorted Sheehy. "It's not enough for *me*."

"Go to it," invited Bill. "You're young yet, but you'll learn better."

By this time they had reached the place where the road opened on to the northwest corner of the plaza.

"Go and get Dick and Sam," instructed Bill, dropping the barrow. "We'll let them lug up the next two loads. We have over forty sacks. We'll put about fifty pounds of sand in each sack. That means we've got to wheel over a ton of sand up from the creek."

"Her mother's sick. That's why she's singing in the dance hall," Sheehy insisted on explaining. "She's the schoolteacher here; but the Summer vacation lasts three months, and she doesn't get paid during vacation. Singing was the only thing she could find to do. I think she's a plucky girl."

"For the love of prunes!" swore Bill. "If there's a sizable rock in this sand you'll get it. You need it—alongside your soft head. Go get Dick and Sam."

VI

IN AN open flat in the foot-hills a mile east of Pinkerton City forty-three horsemen had gathered. The time was an hour before dawn. Snake Humphries had just finished counting heads. Now he addressed his band.

"Get these plans straight, and each man do his part. The whole thing will be as easy as opening a can of sardines. We'll cut right through the hills toward the plaza. When we reach the open valley we'll stop. A few of us at a time will ride directly to the east fence of Brown's corral and tie our horses. No talking or laughing, see! What noise our horses make will be attributed to the dozen or so horses which are now in the corral. It's about two hundred yards across the corral and the plaza to the jail.

"The men carrying dynamite will follow me to the bank. 'Wheatstraw' Jones will pick two men to cover the street leading south from the bank, and station two more men at different points to throw lead at any one coming out of the houses on the east road. 'Fat' Armstrong will cover the alley by the court-house. 'Shorty' Dugan will pick three men and hold the street south of Pheely's store. Buck Dugan had better stand outside the rooming-house across the alley from the court-house. Keep lead flying at anybody who comes in sight. Most of the town being south of the plaza makes our plan easy. Otherwise we'd stir up a hornets' nest. Keeping everybody south of the plaza is the keynote of the whole raid."

"How about the houses at the northeast corner?" inquired Ace Murphy.

"I was coming to that. Chug McKenzie will lay behind the watering-trough in front of Brown's stable with another man to cover those houses. He'll pick two other men to lay behind the watering-trough in front of the feed-store on the north side. These four men are to cover and throw lead at any one starting anything from the houses on the northeast corner. You're to go quietly to your appointed stations.

"The rest of you men will follow Ace Murphy to the jail. You're to take the big telegraph pole lying in the vacant lot across from the bank. Ace says there's three oak bars inside the jail door, but twenty men rushing the butt end of that heavy pole against the door will knock it clear across the room.

"Remember, Ace, the jail porch is about eight feet wide. Leave ten or twelve feet clear on the butt end of the pole, so there'll be no stumbling. Get lots of speed behind the pole before it hits the door. Ace will stand on the porch and flash his bull's-eye lamp on the spot he wants you to hit the door.

"Four men are sleeping in the room off the jail office. Ace will pick two or three of you to follow him in as soon as the door goes flying. The crash will wake up that —— sheriff and his deputies. With luck you'll be able to shoot them before they realize what's happening. Shoot them like dogs before they gather their wits or reach for their guns. Ace will get the jail keys and turn loose Jake and the rest of the boys.

"In the mean time, those who aren't picked to follow Ace into the jail will rush the telegraph pole back across the plaza to the bank. One smash, and the bank door will be open. The men with the dynamite will follow me into the bank. The moment the bank door is down the men who have been handling the pole will rush for their saddle-guns and scatter around to hold the plaza. There'll be light enough then to see your sights.

"That big bank vault is old-fashioned. The two cases of dynamite will blast it all to ——"

"Better not use all of it," cautioned Murphy. "It might blow out the walls of the bank. We'd have to dig for a week then to get the money and bullion."

"Leave that to me!" snapped Humphries. "I'll blow open the vault, not the building. I have twelve gunny-sacks behind my saddle to pack the stuff into.

"Ace, when you hear the dynamite go off, pick some men to rush about a dozen horses around to the bank. As soon as we get a sack of stuff on a horse, one man will mount it and start for home. The sooner we get the gold out of town the better."

"How about Jake, Red, Jimmy and the two other boys?" inquired Ace. "I'll turn them loose, but how about horses? Will they ride double?"

"I slipped a little there," acknowledged Snake. "Tell those five boys to grab guns from the sheriff's office and break into Brown's stable to get horses for themselves.

They can use their judgment what to do after that.

"Oh, yes, don't forget your masks. Some of you boys have been too cocky and careless. Many a man has been cinched and sent to Santa Fé because he wouldn't wear a mask when he was working. Just remember that."

Snake turned and looked at the eastern skyline.

"Come on," he ordered, and led the way over a ridge and down into a wide draw.

THE first gray reflection of dawn was just taking form on the mountain-peaks to the eastward when twenty outlaws picked up a telegraph pole and started across the plaza. The pole was a young green pine, ten inches across at the large end and over forty feet in length.

"Take it easy, boys; take it easy," whispered Ace Murphy, passing down the length of the pole. "We got lots of time."

He hurried back to the front of the men. Already he had picked three to follow him into the sheriff's office, and these three were in the lead on the pole.

Two minutes later Ace tiptoed gingerly onto the jail porch. He had removed his spurs lest their clanking be heard. Fervently he wished he had ordered all of the twenty to remove theirs. The faint tinkle of rowels coming through the morning mist sounded alarmingly loud.

He pushed back the slide from his bull's-eye lamp and flashed its beam on the metal-covered door. Once he flashed the light toward his men, then back on to the door and held it on a spot just below the center.

He saw the men start toward him with tinkling of spurs and the thumping of boots in the dust as they gathered speed. They were on the dead run as the end of the pole flashed across the width of the porch.

Crash! Down went the door. Immediately Ace leaped across the pole and through the doorway. A few steps behind came his three picked men, Colts in their hands. Not more than two seconds after the smashing of the door Ace stood in the doorway of the small room off the sheriff's office. In his left hand was the bull's-eye, in his right a Colt, cocked, ready to shoot.

But there were no officers in the room. Three cots were there, with blankets tumbled carelessly.

Ace felt a swift premonition of disaster, that something was decidedly wrong, that a trap had been sprung in which he was *not* playing the expected rôle of trapper.

"They're not there!" he blurted out huskily to his three gunmen.

"Hardly!" came a laughing response. "Anything I can do for you gentlemen?"

It was Bill Collier's voice.

Ace sprang aside as if he had been touched by a hot iron. His Colt spat twice in the direction of the voice. The bull's-eye flashed momentarily on the door of perpendicular steel bars leading into the jail corridor, revealing a breastwork of gunny-sacks behind the bars. He fired again. Then Collier opened up with a pair of Colts which he stuck over the sand-bags.

Ace slumped to the floor. One of his gunmen opened fire at pointblank range. He, too, went down, and one of his companions with him, for Bill, working both guns, swept the room with twelve bullets in about half that number of seconds. The fourth gunman, untouched by lead but suddenly panic-stricken, ran from the office and across the plaza to the bank. Midway he passed the men carrying the telegraph pole.

"Snake, we ran into a trap!" he announced breathlessly. "The sheriff wasn't in the sleeping-room. Four men cut loose at us from behind sand-bags in the jail corridor. Ace, Pete and 'Fishface' got theirs. I was lucky to get away—with four men shooting at me."

This was an unconscious tribute to Bill, for he was the only officer in the jail.

"——!" swore Humphries. "We'll get the stuff out of the bank first, then go back and smoke out those —— officers. I won't leave town till I turn loose my cousin, Jimmy the Kid and the other boys. Tell them to shake a leg with that telegraph pole."

By this time there was light enough to shoot by. Up-stairs in the corner room of the bank buildings crouched Dick Atchison. Both windows were barricaded with sand-bags, with loop-holes to shoot through. He was safe from direct attack, for all the windows on the lower floor were covered by locked iron shutters. He was depending on Phillips and Sheehy to discourage battering-in of the bank door. With him he had three Winchesters with filled magazines and about one hundred cartridges in reserve. And Atchison was the man who had won

the gold medal for rifle-shooting at the Cheyenne Roundup.

Diagonally northwest across the plaza two corner buildings were held by Phillips and Sheehy. The former had the four upper windows of a two-story brick building. From the windows on the west side he could protect the rear of the one-story structure where Sheehy was entrenched. All the windows were piled with protecting sand-bags.

Phillips in the second-story windows was as safe from direct attack as Atchison in the bank. Sheehy was more exposed, but all four sides of his building could be covered by defensive fire. From the barricaded window of cell number four Bill Collier at a fifty-yard range could cover the west, and weakest, side of Sheehy's entrenchment.

Atchison waited until the men with the telegraph pole were not more than one hundred feet from the bank. Then he cut loose and shot fast. A man dropped at every shot.

Sheehy and Phillips joined in. Seven men went down before the others dropped the pole and fled for cover. Two more dropped before they gained the shelter of the alley running south from the plaza.

By this time shots were popping fast all around the plaza. The four bandits holding the main street were busily engaged in pumping lead to the south, holding back armed citizens aroused by the firing.

To this quartet, after scattering Snake and the dynamite group at the bank door, Sheehy and Phillips gave their attention. Two of them were behind the corner of Oggie's Restaurant, one behind the corner of Pheely's Emporium and one crouched behind the raised porch.

Three of these dropped. The fourth man ran to the shelter of the watering-trough at the north side of the emporium. Here he was safe from the angles of fire.

From the northeast corner came the rapid *whanging* of six-shooters and puffs of black-powder smoke. The two outlaws behind the watering-trough in front of Brown's Livery Stable attempted to stop this annoying interference on the part of rank outsiders.

Atchison potted both of them. He hated to shoot men in the back, but it was his duty to protect the lives of good citizens.

By this time over twenty bandits were out of the fight. The rest were scattered, with no means of communicating with their leader. They were already beaten, and beaten badly.

Phillips kept his hand in by shooting the outlaw across the street by the blacksmith shop. This man had kept his post and had kept throwing lead south on the residential street.

Ten of the raiders were in the alley by the court-house. Their position was getting too hot. Half a dozen of the gun-fighting inhabitants of the town were smoking them out from the south. Sheehy was bouncing lead at them by shooting at the brick wall of the rooming-house across the alley.

Seven survivors made a break for life, running down the street toward the bank and braving the angle fire of Phillips and Sheehy. Two of them went down from Atchison's accurate shooting as they crossed the street and ran for their horses.

Phillips spotted the outlaws behind the watering-trough. Going to another window, he shot down one of them. The other ran through a vacant lot and escaped.

The firing abruptly ceased. There was nothing left in sight to shoot at. Snake Humphries and those of his men who were able to reach their horses were making tracks for their native fastness.

Forty-three men had ridden into Pinkerton City with the expectation of having everything their own way. Seventeen of them, many of them wounded, rode out of town, fully convinced that the law had arrived in Pinkerton county with a bang.

Their stories differed. Snake Humphries estimated that at least ten men had been entrenched in the brick buildings around the plaza. Snake was conservative. Most of his men insisted that not less than twenty officers could have inflicted so many casualties in so short a time.

One man, wounded in three places, declared emphatically that the sheriff must have sworn in at least fifty deputies, and that all of them had been on the job. But this man had run the gantlet from the alley to the corral with Sheehy, Phillips and perhaps half a dozen citizens popping away at him. He is not to be blamed if his estimate was exaggerated. Three .44 slugs are enough to warp any man's sense of judgment.

Several armed citizens timorously poked their heads out of the alley. Sheehy and Phillips held their fire. It was open season only for men wearing masks.

"Cock-eyed coyotes!" exclaimed one of them, viewing the plaza toward the bank. "That shuriff and his new depities are sure the shootenest men! They must be turrible fast with their Winchesters."

Which was only taking in a little more territory on this same citizen's amazed comments about the sheriff after the bump-off of Bob Humphries.

Bill Collier came on to the jail porch, stopped to roll and light a cigaret and hailed Doc Hostings, who came running up the main street. Doc carried a double-barreled ten-gage shotgun and wore no coat or hat. In his haste he had even forgotten to put on his toupee.

"Hey, Doc, who scalped you?" yelled Bill.

Doc slapped one hand to his bald head, then turned and scurried back down the street. He made the two hundred yards to his office in about twenty-four seconds, which is a record for a fat man carrying a shotgun. He was sensitive about his baldness.

Bill met him as he returned, wearing toupee, hat and the official black frock coat. Perhaps two hundred men, women and children had gathered around the plaza by this time. The wounded outlaws were being carried into the court-house.

"Better get your instruments and a lot of bandages, Doc," said Bill. "Snake Humphries brought a lot of patients for you this morning."

"Did he make a jail delivery?" gasped Doc, still puffing hard.

"Hardly," answered Bill. "He only tried to."

HALF an hour later an official count had been made. Lying in a row in front of the courthouse were the bodies of eleven outlaws. Inside, being administered to by Doc Hostings, Sheehy and Miss Fowler, were fifteen more. Doc announced that there was no hope for at least seven or eight of these.

"Somebody rung up bull's-eyes on them," said Doc. "Those forty-fours may not be worth a hoot at long range, but at short range those soft, heavy slugs tear a man all to ——."

The townspeople had not escaped entirely from the covering fire of the bandits. One citizen had been killed and two wounded. As luck would have it, the dead man had been the father of eight children.

"What will I do?" cried the widow to Bill. "Why—I haven't even money enough to bury him decently!"

Bill gulped.

"Wait a minute, ma'am."

He walked over and began searching the bodies.

On the first outlaw he found a money-belt containing eighteen hundred dollars. On the others he found lesser sums. When he had completed the search the hat was nearly filled with gold, silver and currency. It totaled something over three thousand dollars.

"Here you are, ma'am," he said, dumping it all into her apron. "I don't think the bandits' heirs will bother you about it. Pheely and the other commissioners may raise heck about this money, so take my advice and don't put it in Pheely's bank. Sink it away. If Pheely hollers to you—send him to me."

"What's that?" came Pheely's squeaky voice as he elbowed through the crowd. "I heard tell that you robbed the dead."

"What of it?" inquired Bill. "This woman's man got killed. Offering her money is almost an insult, but her kids have got to eat. Am I right?"

He looked belligerently around at the crowd. There were many approving nods, and no objections.

"Now, Pheely," grinned Bill, "don't get in wrong with the voters. Get on the bandwagon."

"Well," returned Pheely, the politician in him arising to the occasion, "legally it's all wrong, but morally it seems to be the ticket. Let it go at that."

"That's the little man," said Bill. "I know you're all right."

Pheely responded with a cross between a smile and a scowl, looked at the dead outlaws, then walked into the court-house. When he returned his face was serious.

"Sheriff, you've kinda put the county in a hole. You'll bankrupt us with what you've done to the Humphries gang."

"Don't let that worry you," replied Bill cheerfully. "I'm not through with the gang yet. I'm a business man, and I'll have a business proposition to put up to the board of commisioners. I'll get more than the reward money out of the county, and it will be a painless operation for both of us. You'll look on me as a public benefactor."

Pheely absently stroked his ragged Van Dyke. He looked worried. As Pop Crossett had put it, "the county had got kinda reckless in postin' rewards."

Whatever else might be said about Pheely he had Pinkerton's interests at heart, or thought he had. The hearts of many men have bled for their countries; Pheely's now bled for his county. But Pheely was near-sighted and possessed a single-track mind.

VII

AT TEN o'clock that morning, Sheriff Collier set out to corner the Humphries gang. With him rode Dick Atchison, Sheehy, half a dozen determined citizens of Pinkerton City and three excitement-hunting cowpunchers who had ridden into town at eight o'clock and who had loudly bewailed their tough luck at not having arrived at daybreak. They were of Sheehy's type, young, daring, careless of their lives. Bill had offered them deputies' wages and they had almost fallen on his neck in gratitude. Bill wouldn't have cared if they had—if they didn't fall too heavy—for he was glad to get them.

Sam Phillips had been elected jailor, at which he had figuratively "hollered his head off." Then he had grinned.

"Well, I can eat and sleep regular anyway—which is more than you fellers will do," was his taunt.

"Go ahead and enjoy life—but get that front door back on its hinges first," had been Bill's farewell word.

As he rode, Bill was more than loaded for bear. He was loaded for stumps, rocks and everything else, up to and including bandits. He was carrying more than the one-man weight limit of dynamite, caps and fuses, which Snake Humphries had oblingingly left behind. As yet Bill did not know what he would do with the high explosive, but as he put it, "It's handy stuff—sometimes."

The posse followed the mountain road until Bill turned off on a trail through the foot-hills. For an hour they rode, and reached the summit of the first high mountain ridge east of the town.

They stopped to breathe the horses and pull up the latigoes. Far behind and below them Pinkerton City lay supinely in the blazing sun. A horse and rider crossing the plaza looked like a lame ant crawling over a square tray of smoothed-out ashes.

"Let's go," ordered Bill. "She's a pretty picture, but admiring scenery doesn't get us any bad-men."

They dropped down from the ridge on a trail which was precarious to an extreme. Sheehy's horse stepped on a rock which rolled from beneath its hoof. The pinto fell and rolled over three times down the slope. Like a cat Sheehy had sprung clear in time to save himself. The horse scrambled to its feet, snorted and shook itself tentatively. It was still in one piece. Sheehy led it back to the trail.

"It's no wonder Snake has been safe in country like this," was his comment. "Whoever gets bandits here sure earns them."

The trail descended to the bed of Buzzard Creek. Like a corkscrew the small stream wound through the mountains. They climbed another ridge, and there, several hundred feet below, was Buzzard Creek again.

This time they left the boulder-strewn bottom to ascend a steep brush-choked ravine. At the top they followed a narrow ridge for perhaps half a mile, then descended to another meandering stretch of Buzzard Creek. The trail led up-stream. In a mile and a half they forded the creek exactly nineteen times. Even Bill admitted that it was rough traveling.

Innumerable hoofprints were plainly marked in the few small sand-bars deposited by the creek in flood time. On both sides towered split-up crags and mesas, steep, impossible to scale—great blocks and walls of almost perpendicular rock, to which clung a few hardy vines and scant patches of brush.

The posse was four hours out of Pinkerton City. They now followed the trail over an inverted "V" ridge, plunged into another cañon and climbed again.

Bill was in the lead. His horse topped the ridge.

"*Zzwhee-e-ee*——"

A bullet fanned his ear and screamed away into distance. Across a wide ravine hung a thinning-away puff of smoke, distant perhaps five hundred yards.

Bill turned to motion for the posse to halt. But already they had stopped; the bullet passing a few feet over their heads had been a prepared message of warning.

Two of the ambitious cowboys snatched out their saddle guns and dismounted.

"Keep below the ridge!" ordered Bill.

With that he spurred his horse and wheeled it to face down the slope toward the posse. Came another bullet—a trifle too high to register on Bill.

"That bird ain't accustomed to a buffalo-gun," remarked Atchison. "They certainly carry up."

Bill dismounted and let the reins drag. The horse was below the crest.

"Come on, Dick," he said. "The rest of you stay back."

Together they crept to the top of the ridge and peered across the ravine.

"I see him," announced Atchison. "He's got his gun over the top of that boulder just above that small cedar."

"That's where the smoke came from," admitted Bill. "But you see more than I do."

"You need glasses," said Dick.

"If you see him so blamed well, get him!" retorted Bill.

"What! With this forty-four?" laughed Atchison. "If I'd pop at him with this he'd wonder what I was shooting at. They won't carry up at that range."

"Try this heavy Sharps," suggested Bill. "That's different."

Atchison reached for the long-barreled, single-shot rifle, glanced calculatingly across the ravine, then scaled up the sights. Carefully he aimed, resting the barrel on the rocky crest. The big buffalo-gun roared.

"Got him!" yelled Atchison. "He ain't there any more."

"I'll take your word for it," said Bill. "But you stay right where you are. Keep your sights lined on that rock. I'm going across the cañon. Make the others stay back till I yell."

Bill mounted and followed the trail down the side of the hill. At the bottom he left his horse behind a huge boulder, and as an afterthought tied his dynamite-laden coat to the saddle.

He looked back and was forced to smile as he noted rank disobedience to orders. Sheehy and the posse, too impatient to await a signal, were strung out along the steep hill-trail. Atchison alone kept his station, his exceptionally keen eyes watching the opposite wall of the ravine, ready to line the rifle-sights on anything which moved.

Free of the dynamite which hampered his movements, Bill took Atchison's Winchester and started across the creek-bed. Buzzard Creek by this time, robbed by distance of the numerous tributary springs which fed it lower down its course, had become a scant but swiftly flowing rivulet not more than four feet wide and about two inches deep. Bill stepped across it and walked toward the opposite cañon wall. He looked up to where the outlaw had been shot down at long range by Atchison.

He found himself stopped, baffled. For a distance of from thirty to sixty feet above the level of the creek arose sheer perpendicular cliff. Above this first rampart, however, was a gradual slope up to the summit of the ridge. He looked up and down the cañon, but saw no way of scaling the wall. It was obvious that the lookout must have reached his position from the other side of the ridge.

Four members of the posse, following Bill, had reached the creek-bed. Atchison still remained atop the ridge behind them. Suddenly the big Sharps roared out, the report echoing away in both directions along the cañon walls.

"Got another as he topped the skyline on the other ridge," came Atchison's announcement, his voice, rendered faint by distance, barely reaching them.

"Hey, sheriff," shouted one of the cowboys, "look up-stream, where the creek turns. Looks like the water comes right out of the cliff."

"Come on," answered Bill. "We'll investigate."

They hurried up the cañon, for a time watching an optical illusion; the rivulet appeared to come gushing out of the solid rock. Not until they arrived nearly opposite this point was this illusion dispelled.

Hidden from down-stream by a jutting shoulder of rock was a break in the cliff, not more than seven feet across at the entrance, but widening gradually. Through this came the stream of water. Perhaps forty feet in from the face of the cliff the water came tumbling down in a twenty-foot drop, broken half-way by a ledge.

Alongside this miniature waterfall was a steep trail about three feet in width. Marks of drills were visible on the rock, showing where the outlaws had blasted out a crude stairway to make the trail passable for horses.

Bill looked up the narrow pass. A hundred feet of rocky walls were visible, with the blue sky beyond. Behind the ridge, perhaps two hundred yards distant, with an open space between, towered the crest of a butte. Almost perpendicular on the visible side, it arose to a height of at least eight or nine hundred feet.

Bill called Sheehy's attention to it.

"That's the pinnacle I saw the guard on when I rode in from the other side. He was perched by those three piñons at the top."

Rifle cocked and ready, Bill started up the trail to the top of the waterfall.

"Hey, sheriff," called one of the cowboys, "if yuh want to run into sure death jest keep a-climbin'. I've heard about this place. Half-way up that ledge you'll be covered by six or seven rifles. It's a death trap. That's why Humphries has had everything his own way for so long. He can't be reached. If you hadn't shot the waddin' out of his organization we wouldn't have been able to get down here. We'd 'a' been stopped back on the ridge where Atchison is."

Bill had halted in his tracks. He had lost all desire to go any farther up the trail. The cowboy's warning fitted in with other tales he had heard anent the deadliness of the trail by the waterfall.

SHEEHY had walked back some fifty feet or so in an attempt to see what lay above the top of the trail. Suddenly he cocked his carbine, took careful aim and fired. He pumped in another shell, fired again, then clicked the rear sight up one notch.

Bill and the cowboys ran back to see what Sheehy had picked for a target. Visible through the split in the cliff, and about two hundred yards beyond the edge of the waterfall, two men were hastening up a narrow trail on the pinnacle wall. Bill saw that the trail zigzagged up to the three piñons at the summit.

"We've got them, boys!" he exclaimed. "Snake was too late in ordering up those guards. Keep those two *hombres* from reaching the top, and Snake's gang will be ruined worse than we ruined it at the plaza."

From the top of the ridge down-stream came echoing the unmistakable roar of the Sharps. Bill glanced in that direction.

Sheehy cut loose with his third shot. Powdered rock fluffed away beside the raised hand of a bandit as he reached up for another hold.

"What do you make it?" asked Bill.

"Two hundred yards does the trick," replied Sheehy.

Again he fired. The bandit he had picked out suddenly stiffened, slipped from the narrow trail and fell.

Bill took aim. Two cowboys fired almost at the same instant that he pulled trigger. The other bandit dropped limply into the trail and lay there.

From down the cañon again echoed the Sharps, with several more spiteful, sharper reports in return.

"Two of them, with thirty-thirties," announced Bill. "Dick will sicken them plenty with that Sharps if they try to swap lead with him at that range.

"Now listen, Jack. I'm leaving you in charge here. Keep that pinnacle trail clear. If I can work around through the cañons and climb the pinnacle from the other side, we'll have everything our own way. I'll blow that trail plumb out. Now I know why I brought the dynamite."

VIII

AT FOUR o'clock in the afternoon Bill had reached the northern side of the pinnacle. He had traveled nearly seven miles to reach a point a few hundred yards from the waterfall. Leaving his horse, and with twenty sticks of dynamite in the lining of his coat in addition to those in his pockets, he started up the steep, rocky hillside, choosing the only available path which looked possible of ascent.

Four hundred feet up, he stopped. Facing him was a smooth wall of almost straight-up-and-down rock. He looked to right and left. On both sides the slope fell away abruptly. He had climbed as far as he could.

He looked down at his horse, and relieved his feelings with carefully chosen words, words chosen for picturesque and forcible qualities rather than for beauty. Again he looked up, then gamely attempted to ascend the impossible eighteen or twenty foot stretch. With the aid of scanty toe-holds and the sacrifice of two finger-nails he climbed about three feet.

One hold gave way. Desperately he

clawed at the rock, then ingloriously slid back on his stomach to where he had started from. Bill was sweating profusely, and boiling mad at having lost several patches of cuticle. He removed his coat, hung it on a rock, and scrambled hastily down the hill to his horse.

Ten minutes later he had climbed back to where he had left his coat. In one hand he carried the riata used as a picket rope. It was a forty-foot length of manila, half an inch in diameter, with a metal hondo spliced in at one end.

He widened the loop, swung it and sent it sailing upward. His target was out of sight, but he knew it was there—somewhere on the ledge above. A scant twig and a few leaves were visible, revealing the presence of a scrub oak. From below, where his horse stood waiting, he had been able to see that the tree was four or five feet in height.

Again and again he swung the loop upward, and each time it failed to catch. Widening the loop, he made several more attempts. Once it caught, but slipped off as he tried to pull it tight. Then he made a high, wide cast, and exulted as he felt resistance. Pulling the noose tight, he hung his weight on the rope.

It held! He pulled out his Colt and through the trigger-guard passed the lower end of the rope. The latter was then slipped through the rifle lever and finally tied to his coat.

There was a double purpose in this. He was freed of encumbering weight and likewise freed of the uncertainty a man is likely to feel if he is in danger of dropping eighteen feet with his coat full of dynamite.

Bill was no monkey when it came to skinning up a rope, but by using the riata he managed to half-walk, half-climb up the wall which had baffled him. A brief survey assured him that having gained this ledge there would be no great difficulty in climbing the remainder of the way to the top of the pinnacle. He turned and hauled up the guns and the dynamite-laden coat. Coiling the riata, he next put on his coat and slung the rope over one shoulder.

THE sun was dropping toward the western hills when he finally reached the pinnacle top. All was shadow in the cañons, but there was plenty of light by which to size up the outlaws' lair. Below him lay a box valley half a mile in length, sloping gently down to the end opposite the pinnacle, where the stream found outlet at the gap by the waterfall. Scores of acres were bright with grass; the stream ran through the center of this, and it was evident that Snake Humphries had made the most of the natural chance for irrigation.

Perhaps thirty horses grazed on the flat; half as many more were in a corral toward the lower end, near several large cabins and barns built of logs. These had been cut in the valley itself, where nothing but stumps remained of what once had been a considerable wooded area.

Beneath Bill's gaze lay the upper end of the waterfall. Near it, in natural breastworks among the rocks, lay some armed men. They were in shadow, and Bill gazed searchingly before discovering all of them. They were five in number and commanded, without risk to themselves, the upper half of the steep trail leading past the waterfall. They could easily stop an army from coming up the narrow gap.

Through the latter he could see the boulder-strewn creek-bed. Twice he caught glimpses of Sheehy or the cowboys as they came past with wood they were rustling for the fire that had been started under the cliff. He almost fancied he could smell coffee and sizzling bacon.

But what interested Bill more than the thought of food were the cliffs surrounding the valley on all sides. Readily he saw that, if the trail over the pinnacle be counted, there were but three ways out of the valley.

The only trail for horses was past the waterfall. Men on foot could escape at the lower end by climbing the slope to the summit of the ridge from which a bandit had taken the first shot at Bill. They would be forced to lower themselves by ropes, however, to reach the creek-bed.

He studied the tortuous trail leading up the face of the pinnacle to where he lay. Much of it had been blasted and dug with infinite labor, but he saw where the labor had been worth while. Two men atop the pinnacle were worth fifty below.

Bill drew back from the edge and removed his coat. In his mind was the intention literally to blast away any chance of the bandits reaching the pinnacle top under cover of darkness. A few sticks of dynamite dropped on to the trail would do the trick.

He stopped to investigate what lay beneath a tarpaulin, the corners of which were carefully weighted down with large pieces of rock. He uncovered four rifles—three large-caliber buffalo-guns and a .30-30—a couple of dozen cardboard boxes of ammunition, five canteens filled with water, half a case of assorted canned goods and some blankets. Also a pair of binoculars.

This discovery made him realize more than ever just what he had put over on the gang. The pinnacle top evidently had been regarded as a very important outpost, perhaps as the key to the defense. Why had Snake Humphries left it unguarded until it was too late? Bill leaped at a logical conclusion: Snake had been badly wounded!

Bill fully expected that he would be forced to remain overnight on the summit. He had been alert, keyed-up, sleepless the night before, and did not like the possibilities of falling asleep during the night to come and of being awakened by the cold muzzle of a Colt being jammed against his neck. Therefore he hastened to make good his first plan of blasting out the pinnacle trail.

He attached a cap to a short length of fuse and tied together three sticks of dynamite, the cap between them. Lighting the fuse, he dropped the packet to a wide level point on the trail about sixty feet below the summit. He did not remain at the edge to see whether or not he had struck his target. Dynamite was uncertain stuff. He would let something happen first and investigate afterward.

The explosion came within a few seconds. He hurried to the edge.

Twenty feet of trail had gone out, leaving a sheer stretch of cliff. Tons of earth and rock were sliding, falling, plunging into the valley. There would be no more climbing to the top of the pinnacle on that side.

Bill grinned as he noted signs of restlessness and alarm on the part of the guards. There was no time like the present, he decided. Stepping back, he lifted an oil-paper-wrapped stick of "giant" and threw it far out toward the group of startled outlaws.

From the edge he watched its hurtling descent. For some distance it went in an arc, which gradually diminished until the yellow cylinder was falling straight toward the earth. He did not know whether or not the dynamite would explode upon striking the bottom, but there was nothing like trying. He was also doing what might be termed "getting the range," for he was learning how far he could throw the stuff by hand.

It struck half-way between the foot of the pinnacle and the waterfall—short by nearly three hundred feet. It failed to explode, but served to put much fear in the hearts of the cornered outlaws who had watched its flight. Their morale had already been weakened by the blowing-out of the pinnacle trail.

Up to this time Bill's object had been more or less uncertain. An idea popped into his mind. If he could scare or blast the guards away from the vicinity of the top of the gap it would leave the way clear for the posse to entrench themselves in the lower end of the valley.

With his jack-knife he cut part way through all around a stick of dynamite, then broke it into two pieces. He threw one of them. It fell shorter than the other try, striking soft earth and failing to explode. Likewise the other half-stick struck harmlessly.

"This forty per cent. stuff is blamed uncertain!" grumbled Bill. "Sometimes it will, sometimes it won't. It's a cinch I can't reach them that way. I can't throw far enough."

His gaze wandered to the rifles. No, he decided, there were three things against them. First, the lower end of the valley lay in deep shadow; the shooting would be uncertain. Then again, he would be up against the disconcerting tendency to overshoot when aiming almost straight down. It would take several shots to show him how to aim in order to overcome this tendency, and in the dark shadows he might not be able to see where the bullets struck.

Lastly—and Bill did not take this much into consideration, it would be five rifles against one—with his head outlined clearly against the sky. The outlaws would have a far better chance of getting him or of knocking dust into his eyes than he would have of getting them.

Bill was ambitious. One or two of the bandits would not satisfy him. He wanted to dispose of all five of them.

Speculatively he stared at the three piñons, which were far enough from the edge to be out of the bandits' line of fire.

Two of them, mere saplings, stood about four feet apart. A line drawn between them would be parallel to the gap in the cliff below. Bill quickly saw their possibilities; he might be able to fashion an elaboration of a boy's slingshot. He grasped one of the trees, bent it down, then released his hold. It sprang upward with a *swi-ish*.

Bill grinned happily, and with his knife began stripping the branches from the saplings. This done, he cut the tops off at a point where the trunks were about an inch in diameter. His next thought was to cut his riata, but second thought showed him that this was unnecessary. It sufficed to tie each end of it to a tree top, leaving six feet of free rope at each end hanging down the stripped trunks.

From the tarpaulin he cut a piece about five inches by eighteen in size, to use as a "pocket" for the huge sling. To both ends of this were securely made fast the ends of the riata. The finished job resembled a children's swing hung between the sapling tops. The strip of canvas was the seat of the swing.

Experimentally he picked up a rock nearly as large as his fist, held it in the strip of tarpaulin and pulled back on the ropes until the saplings were bent into quarter-circles. Then he released his two-handed clutch on the canvas.

Zip! The saplings snapped abruptly back to upright positions. The rock went flying. Bill peered down to watch the result. The missile struck not more than twenty feet from one of the bandits, who leaped to his feet, startled.

His next work was to take three sticks of dynamite and cut each of them in half. These half sticks were four inches in length. The diameter of each was an inch and a half. Bill experimented for a few moments. He wanted to make a package as nearly square as possible. He finally bound five of the half-sticks into a compact bundle, with cap and fuse attached.

He lighted the very short fuse and hastened to shoot the packet out into space as he had shot the rock. As he walked to the edge and watched the arching smoke-ribbon left behind by the burning fuse he was counting aloud. Slowly he counted to seven, then held his breath. The dynamite appeared to be falling directly into the center of the rocks where lay the bandits holding the trail.

Then a terrifically sharp explosion in mid air, less than fifty feet above the rocks. The fuse had been too short—so Bill thought.

He took another quick think, however, as he noted the result. The outlaws spilled out from among the rocks and ran up the valley. Three of them left their rifles behind. One held his fingers in his ears. Two reeled and staggered drunkenly. Two were looking fearfully toward the pinnacle summit. One of these tripped on a rock and fell sprawling.

"I'll be danged!" exclaimed Bill to himself. "Concussion or something else gosh-awful knocked them plumb cuckoo. A neat job instead of a messy one—and I'm glad of it."

He gazed down through the gap by the waterfall. Sheehy and the cowboys, below on the creek-bottom, were looking up at him. Bill motioned with his arm and otherwise wig-wagged the best he could in sign language for them to come up the trail through the waterfall gap. They came.

THE rest was easy. Bill fixed several caps and fuses, then began throwing sticks of dynamite farther up the valley, toward the log houses. He registered two direct hits with more or less damage before a man ran out and began waving a white cloth. Sheehy yelled for all hands to come out into the open.

Seven men and eight women hurried out of the cabins.

"My ——!" thought Bill. "I didn't know there were any women around. At that, those sticks couldn't have hurt anybody in the cabins. But they sure sounded awful. Dynamite is one grand little pacifier."

He watched his deputy handle the situation.

Sheehy, leaving the cowboys and citizens behind the rocks with their rifles ready, advanced alone. With his three pairs of handcuffs he shackled six bandits into couples. Perfunctorily searching them and the seventh man to be sure they were disarmed, he entered one of the cabins. To the women he paid no attention at all.

Bill obtained the binoculars from beneath the tarpaulin. It was rapidly growing dusk in the valley depths. He focused the glasses just in time to see one of the women break away from the others and run for the door

of the cabin into which Sheehy had disappeared. In her hand was a pistol.

Involuntarily Bill called out to his deputy, but even as he yelled he realized the futility of it. The woman walked to the cabin wall and stood near the door, awaiting Sheehy's reappearance.

"Confound women!" muttered Bill, raging in his helplessness. "Her husband or her lover's been shot, and she's crazy."

Then Sheehy unexpectedly popped around a corner of the cabin, came on the woman from behind and took the gun away from her.

"By golly!" breathed Bill in relief. "They have to go fast to catch that boy napping."

He waited until he saw the posse join Sheehy, then hastily untied the riata from the saplings and hurried down the far side of the pinnacle. To put it mildly, he was condemning his haste in blasting out the pinnacle trail. It was still light on the ridges, but dusk lay heavily in the cañons.

Below on the ledge he threw the riata over the scrub oak and slid down the doubled rope, which he allowed to remain hanging as he scrambled down to his horse. By this time it was dark.

Leading the animal, he attempted to retrace his path back through a maze of cañons and over ridges to where Buzzard Creek tumbled out of the valley. In the light of day the piñon-topped peak had been a guide; now in the darkness he had nothing. He admitted to himself that trying to find the way through seven miles of rough strange country in the darkness was worse than foolish, but his eagerness to rejoin the posse drove him on. Very properly he soon lost all sense of direction, and spent the entire night in getting lost worse than ever.

Three hours after daybreak, hungry, weary, with a painful assortment of blisters on his feet, he finally climbed the trail by the waterfall. The one gratifying thing was that Sheehy and Atchison had things arranged as Bill would have desired them. To the corral fence were tied a number of saddled horses, ready to take posse and prisoners to town. The deputies were waiting only for Bill to show up, and the first sign of his coming was the signal for biscuit dough and bacon to go on the griddle.

As Bill began stowing away fried biscuits, bacon and coffee, Atchison gave his report.

"There's three dead men here. Snake Humphries is one of them. There's seven badly wounded. Four of the women want to stay here and nurse them till they can be moved. The other four women want to get to Pinkerton. What'll you do with them?"

"Nothing," said Bill, pouring another cup of coffee. "We got nothing against them. Take them to town and let them go their ways. So Snake's dead, eh? Thought he wasn't on the job when those men were late starting up to the top."

"Funny thing," commented Atchison, "about Snake's death. There's something in the Bible that can be twisted to read, 'Those who live by the gun, will die by the gun.' Something like that, only it's swords instead of guns.

"Snake never got a scratch in the shooting around the plaza. But his time had come to pass; he couldn't get away from it. He rode clear up here with what was left of his men. Coming up through the gap by the waterfall Snake was drilled through the lungs by a forty-five-seventy slug. Somebody's rifle is supposed to have gone off by accident."

"Maybe it *was* an accident," said Bill. "Dick, there's a —— of a big moral somewhere in Snake's passing out that way, but I'm not sure just what it is."

"I'll agree with anything in that line," answered Dick. "It made me think for a while. But all that's on my mind right now is a suspicion as to why Buddie Sheehy is in such a danged big sweat to get back to town."

"Let's get started and maybe we'll find out," said Bill. "I've got a couple of suspicions myself."

IX

THE Pinkerton County board of commissioners was in session. Standing-room in the courthouse was at a premium. Oggie Simmons and Horatio Pheely were exchanging personal insults, which, though unparliamentary, had come to be accepted as a regular part of each meeting.

"The county can't stand it, I tell you!" squeaked Pheely. "Our citizens will be bled dry by this outrageous special tax you propose. When we offered all those rewards we didn't expect that any one would try to collect them all in one bunch.

"Special bond issue? Bah! Who would

buy them? And to save the county money I'm going to look up the law to see if there ain't something to the effect that a salaried officer ain't entitled to rewards if we don't want to pay them."

"You—you oughta be rode out of town on a rail," was Oggie's comeback. "We've jest gotta pay them rewards; they ain't no other way out."

"Oggie, if your brains were brass they wouldn't balance a pinhead," interjected Pheely, smiling with satisfaction as he realized that Simmons would have to go some to catch up with this insult.

Oggie merely frowned at the interruption, assumed an attitude which was a cross between the poses of Henry Clay and Napoleon, and opened up his heavy guns of oratory.

"Mr. Chairman, contemporary members of the board and fellow citizens, these will be my last words on the subject."

"Thank ——!" was Pheely's squeaky stage whisper.

"Gentlemen," continued the harassed Mr. Simmons, "the honor and integrity of Pinkerton County are at stake. In good faith we offered rewards for the capture of the rapscallions who have ravaged our hills and valleys, have looted our stages and robbed our citizens with impunity."

"They used guns on me," squeaked Pheely.

"In good faith," Oggie went on. "Sheriff Collier nobly undertook to wipe out the blight that has afflicted our county until the mines closed down and business went to the dogs."

"Tell Pheely to try axle-grease on his throat," came a voice from the crowd.

Simmons grinned, then resumed seriously:

"And now I demand that we protect our integrity, uphold our good names and honor and show our gratitude by paying to the last dollar the rewards we have offered, the rewards to which our brave, fighting sheriff is so justly entitled."

He glared around the room and at Pheely in particular.

"And furthermore," he went on, "I want to say that any man who has so little sense of honor, who is so low, as to vote that we renege on our obligations is not fit to live in a den of skunks."

Pheely popped up like a jack-in-the-box, his face purple.

"Dang you, Oggie Simmons! That's going too far! I demand an apology! Take back those words!"

Oggie grinned maliciously.

"I'm willing to take them back. You *are* fit to live in a den of skunks."

Pheely spluttered, his face grew even more apoplectic as he realized that he had fallen into a trap, and that he had no comeback at all. From the spectators came a riotous outburst. Some of them doubled up with laughter.

"Sock it to him, Oggie," came a voice.

Oggie maintained his grin. With one short sentence he had made himself solid with the voters, had made the other board members afraid to oppose him, and, last but far from least, had achieved the miracle of silencing Pheely. He went on:

"Our sheriff is present. He said he wanted to make a proposition. Let him take the floor."

Oggie sat down.

Bill arose, walked to the platform and faced the assemblage.

"Gents, she simmers down to this: I've got over sixteen thousand dollars coming to me from the county. There's about seven thousand in the special fund. Are you willing to pay me the amount of cash you have on hand and let me take the rest of it out in what you might call trade?"

Simmons jumped up.

"Mr. Chairman, call a vote on the proposition that we pay the sheriff seven thousand immediately."

A standing vote was called. Pheely alone kept his seat. He sulked.

"It has been voted that we pay the sheriff the money we have on hand," said the restaurant owner, shooting a grin in Pheely's direction. "So far, so good. Now, Mr. Sheriff, how do you want to take the rest out in trade?"

"Well," announced Bill, "the stage company's gone bankrupt. They can't pay the rewards they offered. There used to be six or eight stages a day running into Pinkerton. For a long time now there's been only one, and that's been losing money.

"For the nine thousand you owe me I'm willing to take a twenty-year franchise for the sole right to run stages and freight-wagons in or out of Pinkerton County."

"That seems liberal," admitted the chairman. "But you've got something up your sleeve. Would you raise the rates?"

"Not a bit," answered Bill. "I may even

lower them. Put in the contract that I can't raise the present charges."

"Let's give it to him before he changes his mind," suggested Simmons. "Nine thousand dollars saved to the county is a lot of money."

Pause.

"He's smart enough to look ahead. I see where he's gonna make a lot of money, and he's got it coming."

"How can he make money where there ain't no business?" inquired the chairman.

"Easy as turning over your hand," said Oggie. "Why ain't there been business? Because Snake Humphries made the mines close down, that's why. Now that Snake's gone along with his gang the mines will open up and business will boom. The county will forge ahead in every way instead of sliding down-hill like we been doing.

"All the miners will come back. New people will come here. Pinkerton will get on the map again, and we can thank Sheriff Collier for it. The stage line will do a rushing business with passengers and freight. I move that we grant the contract to the sheriff on his terms. Mr. Chairman, call a vote."

Oggie's rosy picture of future prosperity reacted favorably on four members of the board, including himself. They felt a glow of gratitude to the man who had made it possible. The proposition was put by the chairman, and carried by four votes. Mr. Pheely again refused to vote either for or against.

THERE came a sudden commotion at the door. Jack Sheehy elbowed through the crowd into the court-room. Belligerently he walked up to Pheely.

"You low-minded, dirty old whiskered goat!" he yelped. "You'll apologize or I'll beat you up till your whole idea of life is warped worse than ever. Apologize, —— you!"

Sheehy trembled with wrath, his hands worked convulsively.

"For—for what?" squeaked Pheely, shrinking even farther back into his chair.

"For insulting Miss Fowler. You told her that by singing in the Bonanza she had rendered herself unfit morally to teach the rising generation—or something like that. She was paid starvation wages for teaching school, and then dumped out for three months without pay. Of course she didn't have to sing there; she could have let her sick mother starve. Beg her pardon! And make it pretty!"

Stammering with fright at the other's menacing attitude, Pheely apologized, his voice thinner and more squeaky than ever. The irate deputy turned to the chairman.

"This body is also the board of education, isn't it?"

"It is," said the chairman.

"Does Miss Fowler get her job back if she wants it?"

"She does, with more pay. I'm sure the others will vote with me."

"Sure we will!" put in Oggie. "We gotta make it up to her for the unauthorized and ungentlemanly conduct of one of our members. I move that the board extends its apologies to Miss Fowler. Mr. Chairman, call a vote."

The best little vote-caller on the board grinned triumphantly at Pheely.

It carried unanimously, for Pheely did not dare antagonize the school-teacher's champion.

"Well, that's nice of you-all," smiled Sheehy. "But she doesn't want the job. She's going to marry me tomorrow."

Bill hastened to shake Jack's hand.

"I made a mistake in judgment, or I might have given you a race for the honors," was his form of an apology. "I congratulate you."

"Ahem!" broke in the chairman. "May I inquire if Mr. Sheehy will remain in Pinkerton City after his marriage?"

"He will," said Jack.

"Fine!" beamed the chairman.

He turned to Bill.

"About the stage-line contract——"

"Make it out to the Pinkerton Stage Company," answered Bill. "It's a partnership formed by Richard Atchison, John Sheehy, Samuel Phillips and William Collier—my three deputies and myself. I've talked it over with them."

The chairman seemed to breath easier.

"There's no law against a sheriff having a business on the side," he continued. "I trust you will desire to continue drawing the sheriff's salary, and that you will split the hundred a month fund among your deputies."

"Sure," said Bill. "I hoped you would see things that way. We'll guarantee to take care of any trouble that comes up."

"Speaking for the business men and

citizens of the county, I feel very much relieved, foreseeing that law-enforcement and prosperity are assured."

"Speaking for myself and my associates," replied Bill, stifling a grin as he deliberately imitated the chairman's ponderous style of speech. "I hope she ain't too danged lawful and orderly all the time. Otherwise we might get restless. We're settling down to be business men, but even business men can crave a little action once in a while."

"Count me out," grinned Sheehy. "A married man will have to stick to business."

Pause.

"But don't tempt me too far," he added cautiously.

The Magician of Ombakura

by J.D.Newsom

Author of "The Rain-Maker," "The Khan's Gift," etc.

BEFORE the accident his family always referred to him as "poor Frederick" because he was quiet and mild-tempered; after the railway smash when the surgeons had amputated his left leg nearly to the hip he became "poor dear Frederick," which was not meant, as might be supposed, to convey any sense of heightened affection or sympathy. On the contrary, the additional adjective "dear" was given a value all its own. It stood for doubt, suspicion and a faint ironical ridicule tinged with condescension. Such subtle shades of meaning are well understood in embattled family circles where the only bond of union is common parentage.

It became a matter of course to apologize for Frederick Neild's ways. He was queer, he read queer books, his mind was queer and his interests were queer and strange. The mere fact that he had been left a vulgarly large amount of money by his father served as an added pretext for exasperation among his already exasperated relatives.

If only he had taken an interest in the horse-show, or the hardware factory or the Tagore Society or bridge he might have been excused some minor eccentricities, but he shunned all these normal interests and preferred the society of his books and his dogs. He was inexcusable, even when his artificial leg was admitted as evidence for the defense.

When his perplexing ways were discussed his sister, Mrs. Dalkeith, always brought the conversation to an abrupt close with the apologetic remark:

"Poor dear Frederick! He is *un*balanced, you know."

Her tone, her repressed lips, her shocked eyes never failed to convey the impression that Frederick Neild should have been

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under the care of a competent psychiatrist in a comfortably appointed padded cell.

Water constantly dripping, as is well known, will wear away stone; likewise a statement, however inaccurate, may come to be accepted as a truism if it is repeated often enough with sufficient conviction.

Then Frederick Neild astonished and bewildered his family with another proof of his eccentricity.

He limped up the drive one Sunday morning in April just as Mrs. Dalkeith, her husband and her son George were thinking of golf and whether the greens were in good condition.

"Do come with us, Frederick," urged Mrs. Dalkeith. "We're just going to the country-club."

"Sorry," grunted Neild, letting himself sink into the porch hammock. "I wouldn't go near that place, not in a million years."

The family stood looking at him helplessly. He always upset their plans, was he going to deprive them of a morning's pleasure?

"Short Sunday morning visit, Uncle Fred?" snickered George Dalkeith with undue emphasis on the word "short."

Neild meditatively stroked his nose with a crooked forefinger and said nothing.

"Anything wrong?" asked his brother-in-law, who prided himself on his common sense. "Out with it, Fred. We're in a hurry, but if we can help——"

"Won't be a minute," Neild said at last. "Came t' say good-by. Going abroad."

"What!" chorused the family.

"Europe?" suggested Mrs. Dalkeith, an avid gleam in her eyes. "We haven't been to Paris for three years."

"Not Europe," answered Neild. "Other way. Going to Honolulu."

"Why?" Mrs. Dalkeith was nearly beside herself with emotion. Poor dear Frederick going off alone to parts unknown! Far away where nobody could help him when the crisis came. She felt intuitively that there must come a crisis and always mentioned it as some definite, concrete thing.

"Health," said Neild. "Need a change. Going now."

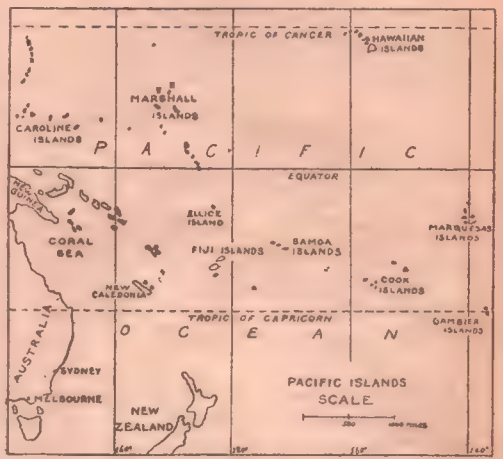
He struggled from the folds of the hammock and held out his hand.

"But you are joking," insisted Mr. Dalkeith. "You can't go and bury yourself like that. If I may say so you are not fit."

"Oh, yes, I am. Got to pack. Leaving tomorrow."

And having shaken the benumbed hands of his relatives he stumped down the drive and out of sight never pausing to look back for a last mute farewell.

Thereafter they heard from him at irregular intervals and his movements dismayed and frightened them. He was in Honolulu and spent his days in the Bishop Museum. Then he wrote from Suva. He had found Honolulu crowded with tourists cluttering the scenery, and he had tired of their ways. But Suva had its drawbacks, and he went to Sydney. For some time he seemed content to dawdle in the Blue Mountains. He even sent a post-card to his nephew who was highly incensed at the colored token of remembrance.



THE NEW HEBRIDES ARE DUE NORTH OF NEW CALEDONIA

He omitted to write for several months and when at last a letter reached Mrs. Dalkeith it came from an unheard-of island called Ombakura in the New Hebrides. Ombakura indeed! He had bought a vast number of acres of jungle, swamp and forest and was going to grow things for the Sydney market.

"Poor dear Frederick!" sighed Mrs. Dalkeith when she read this. "Something *must* be done."

This feeling of responsibility underlay every reference the family made to the errant Neild. That their relative should have chosen to lose himself on some atoll in the Pacific was bad enough, but that he should become a glorified market-gardener left them gasping and helpless.

Soon they discovered that he was making inroads on his bank-account, which every one felt was only held in trust for his nephew, and the limit of their endurance was reached.

He was squandering money! That was the cardinal sin. He was throwing away great sums while living in solitude on an odious island called Ombakura.

"What can we do?" wailed Mrs. Dalkeith. "Poor dear Frederick always was queer. He needs attention."

"I'll say he does," snapped her husband. "Sophie, he's crazy. He never recovered from the shock of the operation. Playing king of the cannibal islands now, I suppose. Humph!"

"He's *un*balanced, you know." The words came automatically to Mrs. Dalkeith's lips.

"I know that. I suppose he's just as safe out there—" he pointed vaguely in a north-easterly direction—"as he would be at home. But he shouldn't be allowed to ruin himself."

"Of course not, but what can we do?" repeated Mrs. Dalkeith.

Common sense came to her husband's rescue.

"Sophie," he said heavily, "there's only one thing to do. Poor Fred must be brought home and—and properly cared for." He spoke as though Frederick Neild's body required the attention of an undertaker.

"But how——"

"Quite simple. If poor Fred found his way to this island of his I can follow him. I'll reason with him gently."

Unconsciously Dalkeith flexed the muscles of his right arm.

"And when we reach Sydney any doctor will certify him. You agree, Sophie?"

"Do you think you can manage it?" She wavered now that she was faced with a possible solution.

"Certainly. George leaves college this month. He can come with me. Together we should be able to—er—persuade Fred."

"I'm not sure whether it's——"

"Legal?" Her husband guessed her meaning. "Of course it is. Perfectly legal, my dear. No man can waste hard-earned money as Fred is doing. He's irresponsible. It's unnatural."

And so it was eventually decided after several long and momentous councils. Clothes were packed, tickets purchased and at last they sailed out of San Francisco Bay on a comfortable liner to accomplish their stern duty.

Two months later a disreputable schooner set them ashore on Ombakura and the skipper, a Dane, gave them his blessing.

"I come bawck in tree weeks, mebbe."

"No sooner?" asked Dalkeith senior as he prepared to lower himself down the rope-ladder into the dingey.

"Naw, mebbe more. Gif my vishes to Neild."

And he turned his back on the passengers.

"I suppose that ruffian has had his share of your uncle's money," Dalkeith grumbled as the dingey crawled in toward the shore.

OMBAKURA lay resplendent in the morning sunshine surrounded by the saphire-blue waters of the Pacific which changed to shimmering green inside the barrier reef. It was a mountainous island, but the broken nature of the ground was concealed beneath a deep-green carpet of forest and scrub. At the water's edge, overrunning the beach, stiff-rooted pandanus-trees, palms and gigantic pines formed a thick wall of verdure.

Once inside the still waters beyond the pass the dingey proceeded more quickly toward the beach and at last grounded on the white sand. Frederick Neild hobbled down to greet them as they splashed ashore.

"Didn't expect you. Taken to globe-trotting, Arthur?" he asked his brother-in-law without, however, exhibiting any great surprize.

He had grown a beard, a pepper-and-salt affair, which was trimmed to a point and stuck out truculently when he spoke. His suit of khaki drill was faded and shabby, but it gave him a spruce, neat appearance which quite surprized his visitors.

"And you, George," he exclaimed. "Taking a holiday away from civilization? No post-cards here."

They answered him guardedly, with feigned good humor and many pleasantries for it had been decided that their mission should not be disclosed until they had thoroughly studied the case at first hand.

"We thought you would like us to pay you a neighborly visit," explained Dalkeith. "A neighborly visit. Holiday for George before entering business. D'you think you can find room for us for a few days? Got a little shack somewhere I suppose? We brought camp-beds."

"Guess I can manage," replied Neild. "Don't stand here. Sunstroke. Come up to the house."

He pulled a whistle from his pocket and its shrill summons awoke echoes in the forest. "Coolies," he explained. "Carry your kit. Let's move along."

He led the way down a broad lane cut through the jungle and after a five-minute walk brought them out into the open where they halted in open-mouthed astonishment.

Fully three hundred acres of jungle and bush had been cleared, drained, hedged and planted. Here and there among the crops coolies went about their appointed tasks. But the Dalkeiths' attention was riveted on Neild's house. Here was neither shack nor bungalow, but a home, large, spacious and cool; built for comfort and ease.

It was a two-storied building, painted white and green, encircled by a deep veranda. A trim garden had been laid out in front of the house; green lawns and shade-trees gave the place an atmosphere of permanency and well-being.

A dozen coolies passed the group and Neild rapped out his orders in a most matter-of-fact way to which the headman gave immediate heed.

"Hindus," explained Neild. "Lot of trouble to get. Hired 'em in Fiji. Lazy. Overseer knows how to handle them. He's a Sikh, but the rest of 'em—sweepings. Can't trust 'em."

He shepherded his visitors into the house where they gaped and wondered in greedy astonishment. Electric lights everywhere, cool rooms, books, comfortable chairs, polished hardwood floors and soft-footed servants greeted them.

"Always keep everything ready," explained Neild as he showed them their rooms. "Friends drop in."

"You have neighbors?" inquired Dalkeith.

"Yeh, a few. One 's on Lopovi, eighty miles away. 'Nother on Maewo. Couple of skippers drop in, too, sometimes."

"Oh," commented Dalkeith, "neighbors! Humph!"

"Now George," he went on when they were left alone. "Now George, I want you carefully to observe everything that goes on. You see the wastefulness of this establishment. It's monstrous. And what's he going to do with all that acreage I'd like to know? Folly!"

"Perhaps a sound fellow might be able to make it pay," George ventured tentatively, a lean, hungry look on his face. "It seems a pity after so much money has been sunk in the place to let it go to ruin. I was thinking——"

"So was I. You might be able to handle this with the proper connections. You never can tell."

After which vague remark he busied himself with hot water and soap to the exclusion of all conversation.

Later they went down to the living-room where Neild awaited them.

"Too hot to go out now," he told them. "You want to rest I suppose. Which reminds me—how is Sophie?"

Having disposed of the home news Dalkeith steered the conversation into more tortuous channels.

"This must have cost a tremendous sum," he suggested. "Clearing the jungle, building this place and so on."

"A bit," Neild admitted. "Not finished yet. Going to plant cocoa next year. Catch crop. Need 'nother hundred acres. Bought a good boat to carry my stuff to Sydney."

"A boat!" exclaimed his nephew.

"Yeh, a boat, George. Have to get another soon."

He massaged his nose with his crooked forefinger and looked meditatively at his visitors.

"I wonder—" he began, then cut himself short.

"You wonder what?" inquired Dalkeith.

"Oh, nothing. Fool ideas I get sometimes. But you must see my sea-island cotton when it's cool enough to go out."

"And you live quite alone?" asked Dalkeith, ignoring Neild's enthusiasm.

"Yeh, except for Rawat Lal. Great man Rawat. You must watch him on the job."

The talk drifted on spasmodically during lunch and the hot slumbrous afternoon, until at last when the shadows lengthened Neild took Dalkeith and George for a slow walk through the fields. Rawat Lal was produced and admired. He was a clear-skinned Punjabi, an ex-policeman, tall, straight, with a black fan-shaped beard and a slow, infectious smile. His eyes—but the Dalkeiths did not notice them—lighted with dog-like affection whenever Neild spoke.

Then they went back to the house where yet another meal awaited them. Neild seemed preoccupied and more silent than ever.

"Mental depression, of course," thought Dalkeith, but he spoke with bluff good humor—

"Feeling off color, Fred?"

"Nope, not a bit. Feel fine. But—look here, it's no good beating about the bush, I wish you hadn't come just at present."

"Ha!" triumphantly exclaimed Dalkeith, "And what might the trouble be?" Obviously the man was ashamed, miserably ashamed. They would be doing him a kindness if they had him attended to.

"Long story," explained Neild. "Try to be brief. There's a tribe on the other side of the island, across the hills. They've been nearly wiped out by influenza. Only a handful left out of thousands. What's left of 'em moved up this way a month or so ago. Live about eight miles away. They've got the fear of the Lord in 'em."

"But what has that to do—" began George.

"One minute," Neild silenced him abruptly. "They're happy savages—or you'd call 'em that at all events—and they used to spend a lot of their time fighting the people of Maronongga. Raid 'em in their war-canoes about once a year. Chop off a few heads and come home to feast. The tribe on Maronongga returned the calls punctually. Social affair, like your country-club manners—no more deadly."

"I feel sorry for the unfortunate people," laughed Dalkeith. "But, really, Fred, why allow their misfortunes to interfere with our visit?"

"Complicated affair," admitted Neild. "Last raid was made by the people of this island before the influenza epidemic. Yam season is only six weeks off, and the Maronongga ought to be along any time. They'll find the old villages deserted. I'm afraid they may land here looking for trouble. The local folk live up-stream now, inland behind this house. Bad business. If we are attacked the coolies will scamper away into the bush. Then good night! You see what I mean?"

He paused, bitterly aware that his jerky explanation had failed to impress the Dalkeiths with any sense of reality.

George threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"Uncle Fred! Same old joker! As though such things could really happen."

But his father kicked him beneath the able to silence him. Neild was lying, of course, but he was possibly obsessed by delusions. Poor Fred!

"They do happen, George," Neild was saying quietly. "Heaven help you if they come while you're here. The gun-boat has gone to Sydney for repairs and I've only some shot-guns here."

Dalkeith complacently shrugged his shoulders. How these mental cases could distort the truth to suit their own purposes! Fred wanted to get rid of them and had invented this blood-and-thunder yarn. Undoubtedly Fred was quite irresponsible. A tool in the hands of his overseer and unscrupulous planters. He must be taken away, back to a civilized center at all costs.

"And why haven't these—er—tribes been punished long ago?" he asked as if humoring an errant child.

"Maronongga! You should see it. Jungle to the water's edge. Nobody's ever landed there and come away alive. Gun-boat shells the place at times. Not much good. Every party that's been sent ashore and goes into the jungle gets hacked to pieces. I got as far as the beach once——"

"You!" Dalkeith had nearly reached the end of his credulity. "You walked into that death-trap?"

"Oh, just to look-see. Came away quick. However, that's the situation. Don't want to appear unpleasant, but wouldn't you be willing to take my launch and run down to Lopovi? Tell Thurless the news and ask him to get here as quick as he can. You could——"

"Nonsense," snorted Dalkeith. "My dear Fred, if there's any danger, and I'm sure it's very remote, we shall stand by you. A handful of naked savages, indeed! We would scatter them in short order. It would be exhilarating. A touch of danger——"

"Just a touch," murmured Neild. "A little touch. Six foot, black, yelling devils with spears and clubs. When they rush—" he left the sentence unfinished. "But that doesn't matter now. Sure you want to stay?"

"Yes, sir," emphatically asserted Dalkeith. "I can answer for us both. We're tremendously interested."

MORE and more as the days went by the Dalkeiths persuaded themselves that Neild had not only lied to them, but that he was quite hopelessly incompetent. They saw him stumping

through the fields in conversation with Rawat Lal and the strangeness of his surroundings made him appear doubly strange to them. They noted every one of his tricks and peculiarities and the seed so carelessly sown by Mrs. Dalkeith became a rank, enormous growth in her husband's and her son's minds. It overshadowed their scruples and their doubts. They fell prey to their own imaginations and saw in Neild's every word and action fresh proof of his mental decline.

"Money can work wonders," admitted Dalkeith, making a sweeping gesture at the house and the orderly grounds. "But the whole thing is bound to fall to pieces when your poor Uncle Fred loses his hold. It's bound to happen. He's—he's a pathological case."

Moreover, the feeling of security and peace which enveloped the place made ridiculous the idea of an attack by naked savages. Dalkeith and his son visited the remnants of the local tribes and came away with the firm belief that such people never had committed murderous acts. They saw a broken people in the twilight of their existence and were unable to realize that these indolent survivors were not representative of a once flourishing, healthy society.

Two weeks went by steeped in sunshine and laziness. The Dalkeiths grew bold and callous in their conviction that Neild was little better than a lunatic and Rawat Lal saw and heard many things which he carried to his master.

"*Sahib*," he said one evening as they stood by the new sluice gates and the falling waters covered their voices. "*Sahib*, these two men are evil."

"Be still," ordered Neild. "Don't you know that they are my kin—my sister's husband and son?"

"But they say——"

"I know—that I am mad because I spend my money as I see fit. Because I have but one leg. For such reasons I am mad. But they go away within a week, and I shall see they do not come back."

"They say that you are to go with them and the young one will be made master here."

"So! This is news. I am to go with them! Your ears are too long, Rawat Lal. You should not hear such talk."

"When it is for your good I hear all I can. From the first I doubted these men."

"I'll see they don't cause trouble," Neild said grimly.

"That is to be hoped, but even a mongoose must sleep, and the cobra need strike but once."

"That may be, but I shall not sleep. Now go and be still. I shall draw their fangs when the time comes."

"Keep the sentries on the beach," he went on. "The real danger lies in that direction as you know."

Another week passed and at last Dalkeith decided that the time had come to reach a decision.

Darkness had fallen, the westerly trade-wind boomed steadily through the trees and the growl of the pounding surf came to them in a monotonous stream of sound. They were sitting in the living-room when Neild, a book on his knees, a lean cigar between his lips, suddenly looked up at the two restless men.

"Mortenson ought to be along within a couple of days. Hope you've enjoyed your stay down here."

"We have," solemnly answered Dalkeith. "And we've been talking things over, Fred." He paused before plunging further, his gaze shifting away from Neild's face. "Don't you think you ought to come home with us for a while? You left so hurriedly——"

Neild adjusted his artificial leg more comfortably before answering and Dalkeith started apprehensively.

"You have been hinting at that for the past three weeks," Neild said at last, "but I'm not going back. I'm at home here. Got time to think and live. Back there you rush too much. Couldn't stand it. I'm staying right here."

"But your leg, Fred! You know it should be attended to," insisted Dalkeith. "And don't forget you had concussion. Those frightful headaches! I'm worried about you."

"So I imagined. Otherwise I can't guess what brought you here. What's on your mind?"

"I really think you should see a physician," Dalkeith mumbled.

Tiny beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and he felt a growing sense of annoyance at Neild's calm command of the situation. He turned for support to his son.

"From what you have seen of your uncle, you agree with me, George, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. I'm sure that a doctor would patch you up in no time, Uncle Fred," George said cheerfully. "And the change of climate——"

"Listen, George," Neild spoke very quietly. "Don't bother about changes of climate or changes of ownership—or anything else for that matter. When I need your opinion I'll let you know."

"But—" began George, very red and flustered.

"Be quiet! Now you," he went on addressing Dalkeith. "What's all this talk about doctors and concussion? Have you anything to say when I tell you that I am perfectly satisfied with my mental and physical condition and that I shall stay in my own home until I chose to leave of my own accord?"

Outside the wind tore and wrenched at the shutters and the sound of the surf had become a steady, muttering thunder.

Dalkeith moistened his dry lips and groped feverishly for placating words.

"It was only for your own good," he said. "Only for your own good, Fred. I really think a rest, a quiet rest——

"You have been all keyed up, you know. This talk about savages. It's been weighing on your mind. I'm only saying this to help you. Your own people, Fred."

He hesitated, wondering what to say next. The whole scheme, so feasible a little while back, had become impossible in the face of Neild's self-command.

"Better forget it," the latter snapped. "I'm not incapable, nor likely to be. Because I don't choose to lead your kind of life you condemn me. I don't like the things you like—not even George. You are stale and trashy. So are your ideas. You've been here three weeks—spying. It's symptomatic of your environment. You've lied to yourself. You imagine you're doing this for my own good. My good! I'll tell you what you really want—my money. You can't get it.

"All your life you have allowed some one else to-do your thinking for you. You've followed in a groove. You're one of a herd. A great driven herd. Ready-made morality, ready-made religion, ready-made politics. Have you ever questioned anything that the mass of people accept? Never. You'd call that immoral, and because I broke away, freed myself, got clear of the rank sham of your conventions to a place where I could at last call my soul my own, you think me mad.

"Mad! You don't know the meaning of the word. Where do you draw the line between sanity and madness, wisdom and folly, courage and cowardice—where?"

Dalkeith sat inert, numbed by the sound of the biting voice, and after a breathless silence Neild went on:

"That'll be all. I've tried to explain for *your* own good. I had my doubts about you. The schooner ought to be here soon. Going to bed now."

He heaved himself from his chair and limped up the stairs without another word.

For a long time the other two sat motionless, unwilling to look into each other's eyes. Then Dalkeith beckoned his son to his side.

"You heard that outburst, George," he whispered. "Just the talk of a lunatic. No shadow of a doubt. Dreadful stuff! Painful. Your mother's brother, too. Tell you what we'll do. Give him a couple of hours to calm down and sleep. Then we'll have to strap him down, poor fellow. Explain to the servants that he's violent; they won't dare interfere with us. We can easily manage the rest. Get him on board the boat and all that."

"Sure," agreed George. "It's the only way. Poor Uncle Fred! I'm sorry for him, but as you said, it's for his own good."

So they waited until the house grew quiet and even the sea and the wind died down to a whisper. The babble of voices in the coolie lines gradually gave way to silence, the servants closed the doors and went their ways.

DALKEITH softly led the way up the stairs, tiptoed along the mat-covered floor to the door of Neild's room. It was unlocked and swung back noiselessly. Neild turned and mumbled sleepily as they moved in the shadows, and then they were upon him, binding him, throttling him. He fought desperately, but at last Dalkeith choked him into submission and they made him fast with strips of torn sheets.

When all danger was past they switched on the light and saw their prisoner lying on the disordered bed, looking thin and wasted and old, but his eyes were black with anger.

Dalkeith adjusted the bandage more closely over Neild's mouth.

"Fred," he said in his most conciliating voice, "be calm, do be calm. It had to be done. We are going to take you to Sydney. Sydney, you know. We'll see a really good doctor. Now you must be quiet. Everything will be all right."

He turned toward the door, mechanically rearranging his rumpled clothes.

"George will stay with you for a while," he added soothingly. "Try to rest. Everything will be all right soon."

In his own room he sat down heavily by the window and stared out at the dark sky where the hurrying clouds engulfed the stars.

The worst was over! They had carried this unfortunate thing through. Frederick Neild could no longer harm himself or others. Soon he would be safely in the hands of competent men who would know how to deal with such cases. Hard luck, of course, but one couldn't afford to be sentimental even with one's own relatives when they became a menace to law and order.

Slowly Dalkeith began to undress, whistling softly between his teeth, listening for sounds of renewed strife. Suddenly above the hum of the wind he heard the faint, distant crack of a rifle. He paused uncertainly by the window. Neild's warning came back to him in a flash— "Six foot devils with huge clubs." Rubbish!

Closer at hand, quite distinct, sharp and clear, two more shots were fired. He saw the red flashes stab through the darkness by the track leading to the beach. There came a windborne sound of shouting, vague and indistinct, but growing momentarily clearer.

Dalkeith felt a sudden chill run racing down his spine and his hands as he struggled back into his coat were curiously clumsy and incapable.

Then a great surge of sound filled the air, softly at first, growing louder, impelling, threatening—the gong in the coolie lines had taken up the alarm and its bellow drowned all other sounds. It ceased, and after an awful stillness the panic-stricken coolies poured out into the night, shrilly yelling, crying, already crazy with fear.

Above the growing clamor Dalkeith heard the harsh voice of Rawat Lal, yelling in some unknown tongue.

Again the bark of the rifles came from the edge of the plantation, a sharp crackle which died away as suddenly as it began. The house was full of noise, fists pounding on the barred doors, a chatter of servants' voices, bare feet racing through the corridors.

George came into the room, his face pinched and white. His mouth was half-open and his lower lip twitched jerkily.

"It's happened," he whispered in an odd, strained voice. "He was right."

Before Dalkeith could answer Rawat Lal appeared in the doorway, a great cutlas in his hand. Gone was the pleasant cheerfulness, gone the happy smile. His eyes were live coals beneath bushy black brows and he spoke between clenched teeth.

"Where is the master?" he flung at them.

"In his room," stammered Dalkeith. "He is not well. Let me——"

"You!" sneered Rawat Lal. "You! I shall go. Stay here."

He covered the distance to Neild's room in two strides and in a second was slashing at the cloths which bound his arms.

"They have come, *sahib*," he laughed. "The fields shall be baptised in blood tonight. It is an old custom in my land."

"And those two—were they not snakes? Do they die?"

"No," gasped Neild. "Leave them to me. They can wait."

The Punjabi nodded his assent.

"Quick, quick, *sahib*. There is much to be done," he urged. "Those coolies fled as I knew they would."

Neild sat up and smiled grimly at Rawat Lal impatiently awaiting him in the doorway.

"My leg—under the bed. They kicked it there. Get it for me."

Rawat Lal choked as he groped for the artificial limb and his eyes were full of tears when he arose.

"I forgot, *sahib*, I forgot. May my head be forfeit," he whispered. "Now I must go."

The coolies' shrieks had died down, a few had sought refuge in the house and stood huddled with the servants in a corner of the passage, but from the fields came the deep-throated yell of the men of Maronongga. A pounding sounded at the barred doors.

"Let 'em in, Rawat Lal," called Neild. "Sentries."

The door opened wide enough to admit three exhausted men who fell to the floor, sobbing for breath.

Neild stumped into the room where Dalkeith and George waited helplessly.

"I'll deal with you two later," he said. "Put that light out. D'you want a spear through the neck?"

In the darkness he brushed them aside and leaned out of the window. Dimly they saw him swing a rifle to his shoulder—poor Fred with a rifle!—and take deliberate aim at the howling mob below.

Then turmoil broke lose. All through the night the attackers hurled themselves at the house, but the handful of men repulsed them time and again. Once a dozen naked savages climbed on to the veranda roof where Rawat Lal hacked them to pieces with his cutlas. The long row of deserted huts went roaring up in flames and by the vivid glare Neild and his people slew the tribesmen until the open space which had been a garden was strewn with sprawling bodies. Spears and stones came crashing through the unprotected windows of the second story and the rooms became littered with débris and broken furniture.

Once Dalkeith caught sight of the frenzied savages, saw their black faces lighted by the red flames, and he shuddered. As the dark hours wore on a sickening panic seized him. The transition from quiet self-satisfaction to complete helplessness had been too sudden and he shook with blind, craven terror. The infection gradually spread to his son and they knelt in the gloom clutching at each other for support.

Dawn streaked the sky with bars of gray and silver, the clouds turned from black to saffron and scarlet. The trees and the fences took shape. The attackers drew off slowly, regretfully and squatted in the open fields indifferent to the growing heat of the day.

The silence became appalling to Dalkeith and he dragged himself toward the murmur of voices which came from the ground floor. With his son by his side he crept into the living-room where he saw Neild, disheveled, grimy and weary, leaning against the wall in conversation with the five men who had helped beat off the attack.

The place was a shambles, spears and clubs had torn great holes in the wooden shutters, the furniture was smashed and upturned and Dalkeith saw a severed black arm lying on the ground by a gaping rent in the door.

"Only twenty-five rounds left between us, *sahib*," Rawat Lal was saying. "Tonight we come to the end of the road."

"H'm," grunted Neild as he industriously rubbed his nose with a dirty forefinger. "Only twenty-five rounds——"

"No more, *sahib*."

Dalkeith's overwrought nerves suddenly gave way completely.

"You must do something," he wailed. "Oh, I can't stand it. I can't!"

Rawat Lal's laughter drove him to desperation and he wrung his hands in supplication.

"Fred, think of Sophie—your sister! If we're killed— Oh, I can't bear it!"

Neild stopped rubbing his nose and looked at Dalkeith with dawning interest.

"Better keep hold of yourself," he snapped. "No time for hysterics. You might go mad. Take your father away, George."

But Dalkeith groveled on the floor, and his son dared not touch him.

Suddenly one of the coolies let out a yell and pointed excitedly at Neild's face.

"What's he saying?" the latter asked of Rawat Lal. "Is he hysterical too?"

"No, *sahib*. But he says that there has appeared on your forehead the mark of Krishna. It is a good omen, a sign of success."

"What d'you mean—the mark of Krishna?"

Rawat Lal's face lighted with a sudden smile.

"You have traced two lines between your eyes and down your nose, *sahib*. That is a common caste-mark in Hind and it is the sign of Krishna."

"Oh, darn that filthy habit," exclaimed Neild. "Never could break myself of it."

"Do not touch it," hastily interposed Rawat Lal. "You would destroy this man's hope."

"I don't see much hope myself," answered Neild, "but I'll keep the decoration if it'll soothe Badhuri.

"Now let me think—twenty-five rounds. H'm. Rawat Lal, I'm going to lie down for ten minutes. Just see Mr. Dalkeith doesn't do himself any harm. He's a little unbalanced at present."

He limped up the stairs his brows knit in thought.

"Superstitious gang," he muttered to himself. "Funny thing superstition. I wonder——"

For long minutes he lay on his bed staring at the ceiling, his hands clasped behind his head. A cloud of insects droned and buzzed about the bodies sprawling in front of the house; occasionally there came a cry from the cordon of black warriors, a dove cooed softly in the branches of a near-by tree, otherwise the island lay hushed and quiet beneath the blinding rays of the noontide sun.

"Superstition—" Neild drowsily pursued his train of thought— "only a step to credulity. Credulity—miracles. H'm. I wonder, now I wonder— By gosh, I'll risk it!"

He slid off the bed and went limping down to the living-room where he found the coolies patching up the holes in the shutters. Dalkeith lay in a corner. His white face was all relaxed and flaccid and his lips moved ceaselessly. By his side knelt his son in an agony of doubt.

"Rawat Lal," said Neild. "I am going out."

"*Sahib!* The Punjabi stared in astonishment.

"Yes. Going out. Twenty-five rounds of ammunition won't last a minute tonight. The Krishna mark gave me an idea. Unbolt the door."

"No gun, *sahib?*" anxiously questioned Rawat Lal.

"No. And I want you to stay here. Don't follow me."

Neild lighted a cigar.

"Watch carefully. If I am chopped—close up the place and—well, just close up. But if I whistle to you grab your rifles and come to me quick. All clear?"

"Yes, *sahib*. It is all clear. But it is not right——"

"That'll do. Now I'm off."

As he passed out on to the veranda he heard Dalkeith cry out:

"Don't leave me here with these people! Take me away. Please!"

"Soothe him, Rawat Lal, nurse him," Neild called back over his shoulder. Then he was out in the hot sunshine, picking his way over and around the dead bodies which lay in the pathway.

From the house they saw him go slowly through the broken gateway, pause to flick the ash from his cigar and limp down the road toward the nearest group of natives.

"What a man!" exclaimed Rawat Lal. "*Wallah!* what a man."

Dalkeith crouching in his corner moaned:

"Now they'll kill me. Oh, God, I can't stand it. Call him back."

"Silence, crazy one," commanded Rawat Lal. "How can I hear if you chatter?"

Slowly Neild trudged along the dusty track. He covered one hundred, one hundred and fifty, two hundred yards. As if by enchantment the naked warriors vanished into the low scrub. Not a sound came from them, the whole island seemed in a dream-like torpor watching him.

He halted in the open and gnawed at his cigar while his hands were busy about his waist.

They must be creeping in all about him, crawling along the ditches, slinking by hedges, worming their way across the fields. If only he could catch sight of them first! If he failed to do so, if a single spear was thrown, then he knew that his fate would be sealed.

Time, an eternity, dragged by. Still he waited, his jaws crunching at the dead cigar-end.

"Nearly as slow as I am, these niggers," thought Neild. Then he saw a group of them curiously peering out at him from the shelter of a near-by hedge. Hideous faces, daubed with red ocher, greedy brutal faces twitching with animal curiosity. For a moment Neild's very defenselessness held them in check and in that moment he began to sing. He sang loud and clear and quite out of tune—

"They feed me on coffee and they feed me on tea,
But all that I want is the jail-house key."

They were coming up all about him now, these six-foot devils, scores of them, their great head-ornaments of feathers and cowrie shells accentuating their height and ferociousness. Some had bone splinters thrust through their noses, others wore disks of polished shell in their distended ear-lobes, and one and all they carried or trailed wicked spears and heavy clubs. The song, Neild's obvious harmlessness, held them for a space as if under a magic spell.

The cracked voice stopped abruptly, and they swayed forward, relaxing by slow degrees. A great fellow sprang to his feet ready to lunge forward with his spear.

"Wait," Neild shouted at him. "Wait, you nut. This show's only beginning."

Again a hushed lull greeted his words and he bent down jerking at his artificial

leg. All in a second it was loose in his hands and he whirled it high above his head.

Shrieks of dismay greeted him, shrieks of terror and consternation.

Magic! Wah! They shrank back in shuddering, numbing fear.

"Move along there!" yelled Neild. "Move along. Back to your boats. Go on. Shoo——"

And he hopped forward brandishing the limb at the horror-stricken crowd.

The front ranks gave, the panic spread and they were away, rushing madly, blindly toward the beach, toward safety, far from this awful white man who could use his leg as a club.

Rawat Lal found Neild leaning against a fence-post rebuckling the straps about his waist. He had had to rip off his left trouser leg and the artificial limb looked astonishingly bright and shiny.

Together they warily followed the fleeing, demoralized warriors and reached the beach in time to see the last of the canoes tearing through the water, headed for the pass. Then they went back more slowly to the devastated house where they found Dalkeith still lying in a corner of the living room.

"Father's not well," faltered George.

"I suppose not," dryly answered Neild. "Put him to bed and keep him quiet. He needs a rest."

Forty-eight hours later the Dalkeiths clambered on board the schooner and the skipper talked to Neild over the railing.

"Take goot care of 'em? Old man plenty sick? I keep him goot. See you soon. *Salut.*"

As the auxiliary engine began to cough and splutter Neild called out:

"George, oh, George! I'll have to spend a lot more money patching up the place, but I don't think you need come out again. Tell your father, will you?" Then he walked slowly away.

"Well, that's over," he sighed later as he stumped back to the house. "I wonder who's mad now?"

Dalkeith spent the next six months very quietly in a comfortable retreat after several physicians had diagnosed his case as "mental debility following shock."

THE WHITE BUFFALO

by Edwin L. Sabin

OCCASIONALLY one reads the statement that this or that renowned Indian chief was draped in a white buffalo-robe. Such a robe probably was a cow robe with the hair removed, and dressed white. The white-buffalo hide was not worn; it was medicine, and a sacred object.

White buffalo were rare. In the later days of the Indian plains the robe of the white buffalo was now and then sold; at a time when cow-robes were selling at three dollars, the robe of a white buffalo was valued by the Indian at two hundred and three hundred dollars. But the old-days Indians cherished the white buffalo-robe as almost beyond price.

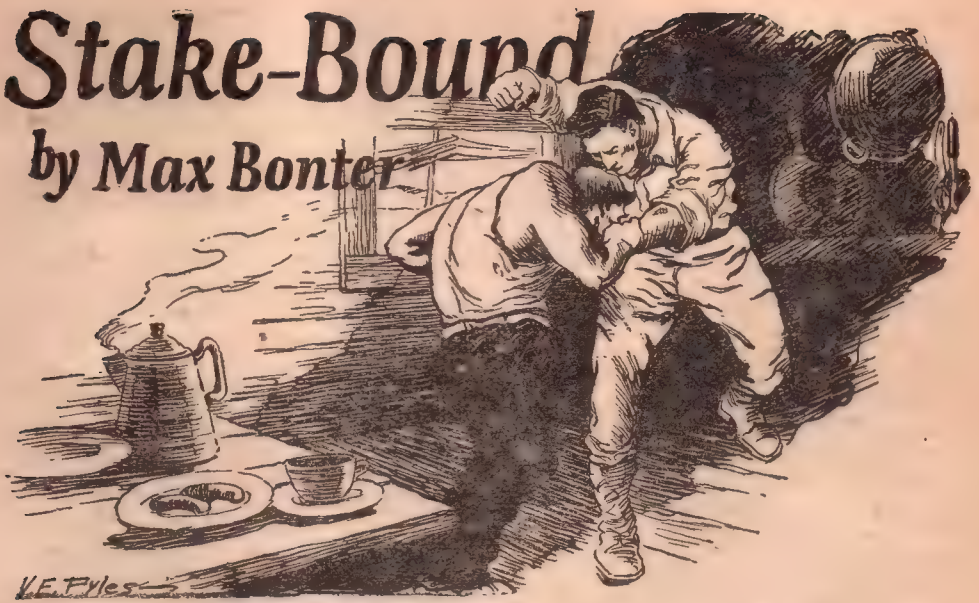
In 1832 or 1833 the Mandans, hearing that the Blackfeet at the mouth of the Yellowstone had a white buffalo-robe, sent a delegation with eight horses and with trading-goods, the two hundred miles, to procure the robe if possible. The delegation left the horses and the goods and returned afoot with the robe.

This was consecrated to the Great Spirit and hung upon a pole, out of touch, as powerful medicine.

Catlin says that not one in a hundred thousand buffalo was white. Even at that the color was likely to be a yellowish-white, and the robe was known by the plainsmen as a "buckskin" robe. The pure white robe scarcely existed.

Stake-Bound

by Max Bonter



Author of "Black Charlie's Towline," "The Black Channel," etc.

DOWN the track toward the railroad station went Simmons the hasher. In his arms were his personal possessions, including his collar and necktie. Simmons was a fat man, but he was traveling fast. His feet fairly skimmed the ties. Little rills of sweat trickled down his careworn countenance, and his breath came and went in sobs. His speed was occasioned by a crowd of men stringing along behind him and filling the mild air with fierce epithets, hoots, cat-calls and various other noises designed to acquaint the departing hasher with the general esteem in which he was held.

Standing in the doorway of the commissary car was Dudley the clerk, watching the proceedings with apprehensive eyes. His strong desire to laugh was weighted down by a serious consideration of his own troubles. It was all very well for a cook to abdicate his job—but a clerk, being responsible for the camp supplies, must stay and face the music. Dudley, straining his eyes after the fugitive, observed that he gained the depot in advance of his pursuers, who thereupon abandoned the chase. Simmons was safe. He would buy a ticket and thus acquire sanctuary with the stationmaster until the arrival of the train that would take him in to headquarters.

The men were returning. They came directly to Dudley's commissary car, and presently all available space thereabout was filled with the gandy dancers who were muttering, shaking their knotty fists and venting their wrath in profuse streams of profanity. Above the crowd towered the big bulk of the ringleader, named Brady, whose eyes held a malevolent stare. The clerk's strategy tended toward an immediate armistice and he opened parleys by asking in mild curiosity—

"What's the matter, boys?"

There was a moment's ominous silence. Then—

" 'Tis a cook thot we want!"

This bark came viciously out of the throat of the big fellow Brady, and the way he looked made Dudley feel very uncomfortable.

"An' we want 'im —— quick!"

The clerk hesitated a moment, scanning the line of bronzed faces about him.

"Why, I thought you got him, boys," he responded feebly. "I saw you trying to attract his attention a few minutes ago."

This attempted levity elicited a volley of barks.

"Thot cook thot ye hod was a belly-robber!"

"Do ye think thot we're goin' to ate anny more iv his rotten mate?"

"Sure, he was afther washin' the dishes

in Bafeshteak John's afore he was hired to come out here an' cook for us workin' min."

"Proones an' dawgs, an' dawgs an' proones! Faith, 'tis the loikes iv thot belly-robbin' cook thot ought to be atin' thim instid iv us *min!*"

Dudley considered it good strategy to listen respectfully until the various barks had been registered and counted, before beginning any argument in rebuttal. Before the barks were half-over he decided that there wouldn't be any rebuttal.

"Well, boys," he said at last in a conciliatory tone, "I'm writing headquarters today for another consignment of dogs and prunes, and I'll throw in an order for a new cook at the same time."

"The —— ye say!" exploded Brady. "An' phwat arre we goin' to ate till he *do* come? Arre we goin' to ate *yet?*"

Dudley surrendered.

"All right, boys," he agreed hastily. "I'll telegraph for a cook. How'll that suit you?"

The gandy dancers appeared to be satisfied with those terms and the peace conference thereupon concluded. Dudley wrote a telegram to headquarters worded as follows:

Simmons abdicated send prunes dogs cook

After a moment's reflection, having particularly in mind the look in the eye of the big gandy Brady, he added to the telegram these two words "husky cook," which addition he felt that headquarters would perfectly understand. Then he went in search of the frightened flunkies, finally coaxed them from beneath their bunks and induced them to go into the cook car and help him get the gandys' supper.

"How did it happen, Slim?" he asked one of the flunkies.

"Well, Dud," replied Slim, "Ya was hep ta the fac' that Simmons was gittin' careless wit' the hash, wasn't ya?"

"Sure, Slim—I knew that Simmons was stake-bound. But the chuck wasn't so fierce but what I could eat it myself. How did the gandys come to get heated up all of a sudden?"

"All het up, hey?" repeated Slim scornfully. "If ya ast me, I'll say them bezoes has been carryin' a full head o' steam fur the las' six weeks. That big stiff Brady has been doin' most o' the poppin' off. If it wasn't fur him, the res' o' the gandys wouldn't be so —— or'nary. Bud, here, kin tell ya the same t'ing—hey, Bud?"

"Sure t'ing, clerk," agreed the other flunkey. "Dis big cheese Brady t'inks he's de whole woiks. He t'rows a plate full uv hash outa de winda. De cook makes a holler. Den Brady gits up an' comes atter de cook, de udder gandys follerin'. Simmons grabs up his collar an' hames an' beats it fur de railroad station. Me an' Slim fades outa de mess car an' crawls under our pads, t'inkin' we'll lay quiet till de lynchin' is over wit'."

The clerk pondered a moment, thoughtfully surveying his flunkies.

"Well, boys," he said at length, "the truth of the matter is that the whole —— outfit is stake-bound. Every one of these blasted gandys has got more dough coming to him than he ought to have. They need a drunk—that's what they need—but they're so danged mean and miserable that they won't drag down and spend up. Instead of that, they'll stick on and on till something happens to *drive* them out; and in the mean time cook and flunkeys and clerk have got to suffer from their cussedness."

"Me an' Bud was figurin' on draggin'," said Slim.

"What!" exclaimed the clerk in dismay. "Haven't you guys any heart at all? Haven't I got enough on my hands already till the new cook gets here? If you guys leave me in the lurch I might as well quit myself."

The two flunkies exchanged glances.

"If you'll only stick," went on Dudley, "we'll put something over on these stake-bound old chaws that'll leave the fear of God in 'em. Just now they're as independent as hogs in a clover field, but the clover won't last. Are you game?"

"I'd stick till —— freezes over if I could see that Brady git what's comin' to him," asserted Slim.

"Same here," said Bud. "We're wit' ya, clerk."

Dudley grinned in anticipation of a plan that was forming in his mind.

"HERE'S a wire from Dudley, Bob. 'Simmons abdicated—send prunes, dogs, cook—husky cook.' Now isn't that Snake Hill camp the limit? They've actually had three cooks inside of three months. Simmons stayed longer

than the others, but he's got the gate at last. What the —— is the matter with that gang, Bob?"

The head of the commissary company swung inquiringly about in his chair and faced his partner.

"They're stake-bound, Paul," said the partner. "Stake-bound—every one of 'em. Those Snake Hill gandys have been packin' a grouch for the last two months. Delmonico's head chef simply could not cater to those gandys on a bet. After a couple of days of filet mignons and canvas-back duck, they'd give him the gate the same as they did Simmons. They're just condescending to tolerate their job for a little while longer till their pay wads grow a little bit bigger—but they don't need a bigger stake than they've got. They've got plenty as it is to break the Eighteenth Amendment, and that's all they want it for."

"Well, the sooner they break it and the harder they break it, the better I'll be satisfied, Bob. But I'm tired of the way they've been abusing our cooks. Why, we haven't a single cook that we can send there. Pringle and Jones are all over their drunk, but it's a cinch that neither of them would go back there as long as that old bunch is on the job—and you can't blame them. I wonder if they beat up Simmons?"

At that moment the office door was opened and a fat man, red of face and with a curious decisiveness of demeanor, stepped within.

"Here's Simmons now," said the senior partner. "He can tell us all about it."

"—— —— ——!"

"Sure. Dudley wired that you'd abdicated. Sit down and——"

"——!"

"—have a cigar. Bob, make out Simmons' pay check while we talk things over. Now, Simmons, after you've spent up——"

"——! ——? ——!"

"We'll have a nice little camp for you where the gandys are quiet and lady-like and have a great deal of respect for their cook. We——"

"—— of ——! Never again!"

When Simmons had departed with his pay check the senior partner got his Buffalo shipping office on the wire.

"George," he inquired, "are there any cooks hanging around there? . . . Sure —need one bad . . . Snake Hill . . . One stranger, you say? . . . Is he husky? . . . Western cook—sounds pretty good . . . All right, send him along."

THE two partners' first impressions of the new hasher were somewhat disappointing. He was a short man—not much over five feet—named George Hoffman, and apparently about fifty years of age.

"Cook much?" asked the senior.

"About five years—mostly West." Hoffman named a few of the outfits he had worked for.

"Ever cook for gandy dancers?"

A slight twinkle appeared in the cook's gray eyes.

"Yes, I remember the gandys," he admitted, "and,"—with a significant emphasis—"they remember *me*."

Both partners glanced appraisingly over the applicant's person. They noticed that his shoulders, while not exactly broad, were very thick and massive; that his neck was short and stout, running out of his shoulders straight into his ears. All his gestures and movements seemed to be quick and decisive.

"We've got a stake-bound outfit at Snake Hill," went on the senior, "that's minus a cook. There's forty old chaws there that have had the wrinkles out so long that they feel like stockholders in the road. Their drunk is long past due, but they won't drag down because the foreman is an easy-going old stiff and they want as much of the easy money as they can get. We *can't* fire them and the railroad *won't* fire them. Of course you, being a Western cook, understand something about these things——"

A quiet smile bloomed on Hoffman's rough face.

"A forty-man camp isn't big enough for me to tie to," he admitted, "but I don't mind taking the job for a while if it will help you out."

"Thataboy," said the senior. "We'll make it right with you!"

After Hoffman had left, the two partners lighted cigars and grinned.

"Wonder how long he'll last?" asked the junior.

"Bob," inquired the senior, "how much was Simmons' pay check?"

"Two hundred."

"Well, Simmons is a slow drinker. It'll last him a week or ten days, anyhow. By

that time, if this new guy doesn't make good, we'll send Simmons back."

THE long table in the gandy mess-car sagged under its weight of food. There were five great pots of steaming Java, twenty loaves of punk, half a bushel of fried spuds, five huge platters-ful of beef stew and five tureens of tomatoes—besides half a pound of sponge cake and a dish of stewed prunes apportioned to each man.

"Slim, I'll leave it ta ya dat de president uv de road hisself wouldn't back down frum dat chuck," said Bud the flunkey to his partner. "But dese bezoes'll holler—see if dey don't."

"Here they come, Bud. Git ready fur the rush."

Down the railroad track a long line of figures could be seen approaching camp at a swift pace. It took them about two seconds to splash their way through a short course in elementary hygiene. Then they battled for vantage points about the mess-car.

Hoffman stood a moment in the doorway of the cook-car, looking over the forty deep-tanned, upturned faces—studying them. The gandys, on the other hand, were intently observing all the points of their new culinary man's person. It was a mutual appraisal of antagonists and both the cook and the gandys were aware that it was such.

Presently Hoffman thrust out a bare arm and smote the piece of rail that hung in front of the cook car.

Dong! Dong! Dong! The sonorous notes rolled over the valley. An observer would have thought that the signal was fire call instead of mess call, and that all the gandys had valuable wardrobes getting burned up. After the rush had subsided, between mouthfuls of punk and stew they whispered hoarsely to one another.

"Paddy, did ye see the size iv the mon's arrm?"

"Indade I did; 'tis like a tillygrof pole."

"Hey, feller, did ya pipe de size uv de guy's arm?"

"Sure t'ing, 'bo; scoff an' say nuttin' is my motter."

"W'at y'u think o' thet noo cook feller, W'ack?"

Whack Hill, the gandy to whom the last of the foregoing queries was addressed, was the oldest shovel-stiff in the gang. Whack must have been at least seventy years old. He had the reputation of having been a swift cruiser in his young days, but report had it that he had snagged on J. Barleycorn, like many another good ship. At any rate the old hulk was game to the last. He had taken a pick and shovel aboard and was honorably digging his way to the grave.

Whack pondered the question that had been put to him by a fellow gandy.

" 'Pears t' me I've seed thet feller some'r's, sometime," replied the old fellow musingly, "but my ol' mem'ry ain't as good as she usta be."

"He looks like a ackerbat, W'ack," rejoined the other. "Mebbe y'u seed 'im in a circus."

The old gandy dancer looked startled. Balancing a knifeful of stew in one hand, he scratched his bald poll reflectively with the other and then sighed—

"By crickeys, I can't remember w'ere 'twas, but I know I seed thet feller some'r's a long time ago."

While Old Whack was busily prodding his deliquent memory for some identifying features of the new hasher, the remaining gandys were looking expectantly at Brady. Brady was the biggest man in the gang. He had the loudest mouth and the biggest appetite. He had been longest at the camp, had more pay checks than any of the others, and was consequently the most stake-bound.

Brady's leadership, by virtue of his size and his general blatantness, was undisputed. All the gang looked to Brady. He, however, on this occasion was somewhat out of countenance. There was really nothing to kick about. The stew was hot and appetizing; the spuds were well-fried and plentiful; the punk was A Number One of the camp variety, fresh and well-baked; in fact all the units of the repast were such that no great improvement in preparation or service would have been possible.

Brady, robbed of an excuse to kick, was surly. With the eyes of most of the gandys directed toward him in expectancy, he felt aggrieved that there was really nothing he could jump on to satisfy their reasonable expectations. There was something radically wrong with a gandy meal that was too well put together to justify a growl, a bark or a holler. Brady was suspicious.

He felt that some one had put one over on him by depriving him of his rightful prerogative to bark.

The other gandys kept looking inquiringly at Brady, and Brady kept groping around in his clumsy intelligence for materials to substantiate a bark; being even more loath to disappoint the crowd of gandys than to admit to himself that the hash was good.

At last, however, Brady was assisted out of his predicament. A little house-fly suddenly volplaned down from the ceiling and came gracefully to anchor in Brady's stew. That piratical maneuver afforded the very excuse he had been hunting for.

"Flies in me groob!" roared the big gandy, picking up the plateful of food and throwing it viciously out of the open window behind him.

Hoffman, the hasher, was standing in the car doorway calmly surveying the scene. There was a sort of weary smile on his rough old face, but the cords in his Sandow neck bulged slightly. For half a minute there was silence in the mess car—silence broken only by the champing of jaws and the scraping of knives on plates.

Brady watched Hoffman out of the tail of his eye. The glances of the remaining gandys strayed curiously between the big gandy and the cook. Hoffman, however, made no apparent preparations for an offensive. This fact was naturally taken as an indication of submission to the despot, Brady; and it duly encouraged Brady's lieutenants and henchmen to emit sundry supplementary barks designed to elaborate the main bark of their leader, in this wise—

"De railroad cumpny's too poor ta buy fly paper, hey?"

"Naw—'tain't de railroad cumpny. It's de *comisery* cumpny. Dat's a good name fur dem—dey's sure mizzerbul, hey guys?"

"Sure, now, they could aisy put shcreens on the windys to kape thim peshts out."

" 'Tis the Boord o' Hilth thot ought to be notified, begorra! 'Tis endangerin' min's lives wid disease jurrums."

"I ain't gonna take no chances wit' joims!"

"Me needer, 'bo! Ev'ryt'ing wit' joims goes outa de winda—hey?"

"Pass dem choims, Buddy. I'll take a chancet on a mout'ful."

"Sure, now!" thundered Brady, his heavy brain at last taking the proffered cue, "whiniver wan iv ye sees joorms in the groob, out iv the windy it goes!"

Hoffman, the hasher, still stood with folded arms in the mess-car doorway, a weary smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. At last he turned about and walked thoughtfully back to the cook-car.

"Bud," whispered Slim the flunkey in disgust, "them big arms don't count fur nawthin'. They's only stuck in a cheese. The noo guy is faded already."

"Faded, ——!" snorted Bud. "Dat hasher ain't no cheese, an' he don't hafta come ta a gandy outfit ta git wised up, needer. Furdermore, he ain't t'rowin' all de cards on de table at de start. Dat hasher knows somet'ing, Slim."

Meanwhile Hoffman and the clerk were talking things over in the commissary car. Both men were grinning.

"How long have they had these symptoms?"

"Oh, ever since Brady's pay wad got big enough to talk."

"Big lad, with the mean eyes?"

"Right-o."

"Well, there's only one cure—a brand new gang."

"That's what I think; but they won't quit, and we can't fire them. The railroad foreman *won't* fire them, because he doesn't want to break in a new gang."

"If they quit, he'll *have* to break in a new gang."

"Sure thing—but they *won't* quit."

"By ——! I'll *make* 'em quit!" exclaimed Hoffman suddenly, while a determined gleam sprang into his smiling gray eyes.

The cook and the clerk continued talking.

"If you can do it, you're a friend of me and the flunkeys for life!" said Dudley at last. "But are you sure you won't get hurt?"

"I'll take along some spuds for tomorrow," mused the cook absent-mindedly. He tossed a bag of potatoes deftly into the air, caught it on his shoulder and left the commissary car. The clerk stared.

"That sack of spuds weighs over two hundred pounds," he muttered in amazement. Then he wrote a long letter to headquarters.

"BOB," said the senior commissary to his partner, "what do you think of that letter from Snake Hill?"

"If we don't look out we'll get in Dutch with the railroad," grinned the partner,

"for coercing their men. But how do you know they'll quit?"

"Any cook can make a gang quit," chuckled the senior, "if he's brave enough."

"Do you think Hoffman has got guts enough?"

"I'm going to take a chance, Bob. I'm going to call up Buffalo and order those gandys. Let's give Hoffman and Dudley all the support they ask for. Those boys are up against a tough game, and we'll stick behind them."

The senior got his shipping office on the wire.

"George, any gandys hanging around? . . . Plenty? . . . Fine! Order a special coach and ship forty tomorrow to Snake Hill. . . . Forty, yes—a whole gang—we'll clean out that stake-bound bunch—they can come right back here in the same coach and we'll pay them off ourselves and send in their vouchers to the railroad. . . . Ha! Ha! Ha!"

HOFFMAN'S second day's incumbency of the hash job was marked by food service adjudged by the clerk and flunkeys to be uniformly excellent. He quickly proved himself to be a culinary ace. Neither did he vouchsafe any such shallow repartee as, "There hain't no more!" after the gandys had romped through the first line of his defenses. His boilers always held plenty of reinforcements that he could throw into every breach. Nevertheless the gandys still barked—all excepting Whack Hill. The fading memory of the old shovel-stiff was at all times striving to reconstruct some circumstance—some scene—some drama of his early life in which he was certain that the hasher had played a part.

When seated at the table, Whack's fast-dimming eyes rested almost constantly on Hoffman while the latter stood negligently in the car doorway listening with apparently indifferent ears to the jibes against his well-cooked food.

"By crickeys, I know I seed thet feller some'r's, sometime——"

"Sure, ya ol' shovel stiff! Ya seen 'im in a nickel hash house on de Bow'ry, hey?"

"Naw—he was runnin' de free lunch counter in a scat-house, hey, W'ack?"

"Bedad, now, he was washin' the dishes in Bafeshteak John's," grunted Brady with ponderous finality, glancing contemptuously toward the cook.

Whack Hill with trembling fingers scratched his bald head, shaking it. The gandys were becoming insolent and the old man was troubled. A sudden steely glitter pierced the quiet smile in Hoffman's eyes, but he turned his back deliberately on the scoffers and walked to his own domain.

"What did I tell ya, Bud?" whispered Slim. "There ain't no come-back in the guy."

"Don't kid yaseff, Slim. Dere's somet'ing up his sleeve. Wait!"

Next day Dudley showed Hoffman a letter from headquarters and the cook grinned when he read it.

"Boys," he said to the flunkies, "give me a hand. We'll take the wrinkles out of a gang tonight."

Slim and Bud, looking wonderingly at the cook and then at each other, helped Hoffman stoke up the fire, grease his pans and perform various other offices assistant to the art of cookery.

"*Wrinkles?*" ejaculated Bud scornfully. "W'y, dem bezoes ain't had a wrinkle fur de las' two mont's, cook."

"They *will* have, before much longer, I'm thinking," replied Hoffman cryptically. "Go over to the commissary and the clerk will give you twenty pounds of dogs."

The flunkies did not understand the cook's tactics. With pans and pots filled with roast beef, mashed potatoes, cake and kindred luxuries, Hoffman was nevertheless asking for dogs. Bud brought him the dogs, however, and stood by for further orders.

"Set the table as usual, boys, but don't put any grub on it—not a crumb."

The flunkeys did as they were bidden—setting out the plates and cutlery and cups. They were casting strange looks at each other.

"Now put a handful of raw dogs on every man's plate.

Bud and Slim stared at their superior officer—speechless. Then they looked at the clock."

"Dis ain't no time ta joke, cook," ventured Bud, "at five minutes ta six, wit' de gandys doo any minute fur deir chuck——"

The puzzled flunkies, seeing a certain expression come suddenly into Hoffman's eyes, stopped in the middle of his protest.

"Joke or no joke, do what I tell you—and be quick about it!"

The cook walked through the mess-car to the farther door, locked it and put the key in his pocket. The frightened flunkies went hastily about the task of putting half a pound of raw dog on the plate of each man, meanwhile glancing apprehensively down toward the railroad track, where a long thin line of gandys could be seen sprinting courageously forward toward evening hash.

"Dis is plain moider," muttered Bud. "I'm gonna be outa sight w'en de crash comes."

"Ya, an' me bot', kiddo! I'm gone right now——"

A set of steel-like fingers clamped themselves on Slim's shoulder. The flunkey winced.

"You'll stay right on the job."

The clerk presently came into the cook-car stepping thence into the mess-car, and glancing at the amazing meal with a sort of sickly smile. The scared flunkies breathed somewhat easier, noting that the clerk, too, was in on the deal.

"Dey'll lynch de cook an' de clerk foist," whispered Bud to his shaking partner. "Dat'll give us a show ta make a gitaway."

"*Dong! Dong! Dong!*" came a sudden summons from the pendant rail. Hoffman smote it with a firm and steady hand, but the last clear notes were drowned by the noise of forty pairs of galloping brogans as the long hash line, with Big Brady in the lead, dashed at the car steps and went scrimmaging into the mess car. Then followed a few seconds of freezing silence.

To Bud and Slim, cowering in the cook-car behind Dudley and Hoffman, the suspense was almost deadly. The cook, however, appeared to be utterly indifferent. He stepped from the cook-car to the doorway of the mess-car, his short and powerful body framed by the door jambs. He had removed his overshirt. Clothed only in shoes, trousers and undershirt as he was, the strength and symmetry of the man had become suddenly apparent. Like a little Samson he stood there, his hands resting on the door pillars.

Quietly and unconcernedly he watched the gandy dancers, his lips curving in a faint smile.

Some of the gandys had swung themselves with gluttonous assurance into their seats before even noticing the peculiar nature of their repast. Most of them, however, were still standing—gazing at their plates with expressions of stupefaction that changed swiftly into rage. Brady—his sensitive soul almost bursting with mortification—was the first to find voice.

"Pwhat the—the—" he choked thunderously, "—pwhat the —— do ye mane, ye scullion, by insooltin' wurrkin' min wid sooch shtoof as thot?"

Even while he stormed, the big gandy gathered up in one brawny hand the supper that he spurned, and threw it at the face of the cook. Hoffman caught several of the sausages—the others he picked from the floor. He laid them all on the mess table in front of him.

"Let dog eat dog," replied the cook quietly, a glint of scorn in his gray eyes. The bully's face was livid.

"Ye— ye—" he began explosively, striving to force some terrible word between his set teeth—some foul and ugly word that would crush the cook beneath the completeness of degradation.

Whack Hill fumbled in his pockets with trembling fingers. He set his spectacles on his nose and began staring at Hoffman. His fading eyes dwelt in growing excitement on the superb muscular outlines of the old cook—the massive, corded arms, the pillar-like neck and the caps of muscle that sat on the shoulders.

"Ye—ye—"

"Better not say it, Brady," warned Hoffman. "I've been feeding you regular civilized grub, but you've only barked at it. Now I'll give you a chance to bark. But bark at yourself—don't bark any more at me. I'm sick of it! Also, if you don't want to eat this dog you can *quit*—you and your whole gang! I'll feed you no more civilized grub—get me?

"You've got too much money coming to you for the good of yourself and everybody else. In your present state of mind you're useless in the world—you're only a pest, like a lazy millionaire. You never *will* be any good till you spend that money, or throw it away or get robbed of it. The Uplift Society would pat you on the back and say 'Good man!' because you're able to dress up with a collar and hames after working hours. But *I* say you're a stake-bound bum, and you won't be a man again till you get rid of your coin and your airs and start in to *work*."

"Ye ——!"

The foul and ugly word had at last bellowed forth from Brady's mouth. Some gandys standing between him and the cook stumbled out of the way as the bully rushed, head down like a bull, fists thrust forward like horns.

Hoffman stepped inside the car—into the open space between the door and the end of the mess table—where he could have elbow room. The gandys breathlessly watched their champion hurl himself into collision with the plain-spoken old cook. The cook was certainly a formidable-looking man, but he was short in stature. Brady was at least a foot taller than Hoffman and his weight was greater by at least fifty pounds.

Hoffman grinned at the gandy's clumsy attack and at first contented himself with merely tripping him. The ignominy of his sudden and unaccountable fall made Brady blaze. In frenzy he sprang to his feet. He roared. He gnashed his teeth. He whirled his long arms like windmills, as though to annihilate his antagonist; completely efface him from the scheme of existence.

The fact that the cook seemed to disdain hitting him capped the climax of his fury. Hoffman cleverly side-stepped, or jostled the gandy aside, or blocked his mad-bull rushes. Brady speedily spent his wind and the violence of his rage wasted his strength. The cook then got in close to Brady.

Presently the stream of curses stopped flowing from the gandy's mouth. His long arms were locked behind his back. He strained, wrenched, yanked. He could not free them. Every attempt toward freeing them brought terrific pain. His coarse red face assumed a dirty grayness. He began cursing Hoffman again—frightfully. At the first curse the cook exerted pressure on the locked arms. Brady's profanity ended in a shriek.

The other gandys were looking pop-eyed at Hoffman. The cook and his victim were stationed just inside of the open mess-car door. The jubilant faces of the two flunkies appeared just outside this door. Beyond them could be seen the smiling features of Dudley, the clerk.

"De woim has toined—hey, guys?" shouted Bud gleefully. "Ya t'ought dis guy wuz hashin' in Beefsteak John's, hey?"

The little flunkey's contemptuous tones roused the gandys from their trance. Two of Brady's cronies pushed forward and tackled the hasher on both flanks. The cook buried his fingers in Brady's big body and used it as a battering ram against one of the attackers, at the same time getting the other in the belly with his knee. Brady was howling with the pain of Hoffman's grip and his two would-be rescuers were poisoning the air with their oaths. Some of the gandys tried to leave the car through the farther door, but they found it locked. They looked desperately at one another, seeking to encourage themselves toward a sudden rush forward that would overwhelm Hoffman.

"One at a time," snapped the old cook warningly. "I'll give every one of you a chance if you want it. After I'm through with this man, you won't want it."

Old Whack Hill kept looking at the hasher, his wizened face alight with a strange fire.

"Come here, Bud," directed Hoffman. "Feed this hard-boiled bum this bunch of raw dog. Lively, now!"

The delighted flunkey hastened into compliance.

"Spah—e—e—e—*yowl*"

The bully's attempt to spit out the dog that Bud introduced between his teeth ended in a loud squeal of pain. Hoffman, levering the victim's arms against each other, had given him a taste of exquisite agony.

"I'm no harder on you than you deserve, you foul-mouthed hog," said the cook harshly. "You've had your brand on this camp long enough. Feed him the rest of the dog, Bud."

The desperate gandy dancer made one more effort to free himself from such a shameful predicament. Simultaneously hunching his broad back and twisting his pinioned arms, he managed to half-lift himself from the hasher's grasp. For one second Hoffman released Brady. Then he caught him again and the bully shot suddenly into the air.

The cook's powerful fingers were buried in him somewhere near the lumbar region. They held clothes, flesh and all in a vise-like grip. One moment Brady was held suspended thus, while the fierce glare on his face melted swiftly into a stare of foolish surprize. Then, contemptuously, the culinary Hercules pitched him forward. He fell in a heap upon the car floor among the other gandys.

Hoffman backed into the car doorway, barricading it with his body. His chest was heaving like a blacksmith's bellows.

"You gandys can do any one of three things!" he roared. "Eat those dogs, or fight, or quit!"

Ten seconds of silence then ensued—utter silence excepting for the uneasy shuffling of feet. Suddenly the blast of a whistle cut the stillness and from without came the distant roar of a train. Hoffman turned about and glanced significantly at the clerk, who immediately dashed down the car steps and ran toward the railroad station.

"C'm on, guys!" shouted one of the gandys. "Are ya gonna let dis one hasher make monkeys uv de whole outfit, hey? All tagedder!"

The imprisoned men gathered courage for a concerted rush. They flung themselves forward, hoping to throw Hoffman off his feet. The cook merely stepped back through the doorway, felling the foremost with the flat of his hands as they followed him. With amazing agility he yanked the fallen ones to their feet and thrust them back through the mess-car door. The man was a whirlwind. But for the fact that he proved really merciful as a foe the gandys would have suffered from broken noses and fractured jawbones.

"Here, guys!" screamed a voice. "Pick up dis bench—t'ree men on each side—swing it like a batt'rin' ram. We kin knock de —— hasher clean offa de cart'!"

The bench in question was about fifteen feet long—a formidable weapon when grasped by a half a dozen husky men. With shouts of approval they swung the battering ram in the air and approached the doorway with its sturdy defender. No man could have withstood such an attack and Hoffman changed his strategy. He quickly shut the door and locked it from the outside.

"Whang! whang! whang!"

The whole car rocked on its springs as the baffled gandys battered the heavy door. Gradually they reduced it to splinters.

"Hooray!" came a jubilant shout. "Le's clean up de whole dump—show dese kitchen mechanics we're dey git off, hey, guys?"

"Brrake ivery bone in their bodies!" raged Brady, who now, when another's wit had released them from confinement prepared to reassume command.

But a sudden shout from the railroad track put a crimp in the gandys' plans of vengeance. A crowd of gaunt figures came surging swiftly along from the railroad station—lean, eager, hungry-looking, gazing at the portentous smoke rising from the kitchen car, keen-scented as timber wolves.

"A whole noo gang wit' wrinkles!" gasped the flunkey, Bud, at last understanding the cook's strategy.

Brady and his stake-bound gandys stared—speechless. Hoffman's rough face wore a quiet smile of triumph.

"Eat those dogs, or fight, or quit," he reiterated firmly. "Here's a gang now that can work—and *fight*," he added with significance.

The stake-bound gandys interchanged sheepish glances. They were ashamed to eat the raw dogs. They were afraid to fight the cook and his new allies. The newcomers were sniffing expectantly—obviously impatient to put their teeth into a meal. They would be bad men to mix it up with. Even now they were grinning openly at the fat and lazy gang they had come to replace.

"I got all I want," muttered one of Brady's men. "I'm gonna drag."

"Same here. I'm troo."

"I ain't in trainin' ta fight Sandscow. I'll fight John Booze, fur mine."

"Gimme liberty instead o' deat'."

"Sure, the camp's no good. They're too shtingy to buy fly paper."

"It is no place for white min. Nothing but dawgs an' *proones*——"

"An' disease jurrums——"

Old Whack Hill now came tremblingly forward, glasses perched on the end of his nose, weak old legs wabbling as he walked up to the hasher and peered at him after the manner of a man seeing a vision. Something was stirring at the roots of the old fellow's memory.

"Who are ye?" he piped in a quavering voice.

"I travel under the name of George Hoffman," replied the hasher civilly. "Sometimes they call me 'Strong-Arm George'."

The old shovel-stiff swallowed a cud of rising emotion; then tremulously queried:

"Say—don't I know you? Say—don't I? Didn't I see you thirty years ago in the Madison Square Garden in Noo York City, pick up the Turrible Turk an' put 'im on his back on the mat? The Turrible

Turk—him that got drownded when the Frinch ship went down offen the coast o' Noof'n'lan', with the belt o' gold around 'im—the gold he got fur ras'lin' in this country—say, didn't I?"

The old ex-sport stopped speaking, still peering into the hasher's smiling eyes, into which had crept a far-away light. The surrounding crowd of gandys had hushed their jabber. They began staring at Strong Arm with eyes of awe. The old wrestler laid a kindly hand on Whack Hill's shoulder.

"Old man," he said, "you've got a good memory. And boys, you can take a lesson from that Turk. He was stake-bound, but he wouldn't quit. He wanted to buy all the booze and women in Turkey instead of his fair share. At last his stake got so big that it was the death of him, because when he got wrecked it was too heavy to swim with."

"All aboard the train, you gandys that are quitting!" shouted the clerk.

Brady and his cohort went sullenly into the bunk cars to get their dunnage, while their empty successors surged into the mess-car and fell voraciously upon Hoffman's savory food.

The disgusted Brady, however, was skeptical as to the Turk's heavy gold stake being the cause of his end.

"Sure now," he was muttering, "'tis no wondher thot the poor divil couldn't shwim—afther ras'lin' wid the cook."

The Nine Unknown

A Five-Part Story - Part I

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Benefit of Doubt," "Treason," etc.

CHAPTER I

"I cut throats with an outward thrust!"

I HAD this story from a dozen people, or thirteen if you count Chullunder Ghose, whose accuracy is frequently perverted. One grain of salt is never enough to add to the fat babu's misstatements, although any one who for that reason elected to disbelieve him altogether would be just as wide of the mark as the credulous who accept what he says at face value. Chullunder Ghose should be accepted warily. But the others are above suspicion, as for instance King, Grim, Ramsden the Rev. Father Cyprian, and Jeremy Ross, all of whom regard the truth from various points of view as economical.

Chullunder Ghose considers all truth merely relative at best—likes to be thought a liar, since under that cloak he can tell diluted truth unblushing. Consequently

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he is the only one whose real motive for taking part in this magnificent adventure is not discoverable; he scratches his stomach and gives a different reason every time he is asked, of which the likeliest is this:

"You see, *sahib*, bad luck being habitual is bad enough, but better than absolutely no luck. Consequently I took chances, trembling much, stirring innate sluggishness of disposition with galvanic batteries of optimism, including desire to keep wolf from door of underfed family and dependents."

He certainly took chances, and he appears to have survived them, for I had a letter from him only a week ago begging the favor of a character reference and offering in return to betray trade secrets in the event of his securing the desired employment.

Then there is Leonardo da Gama the Portuguese, who is dead and tells no tales; but his death corroborates some part of what he said to me, for one, and to others as will presently appear. His motive seems to have been mercenary, with the added zest of the scientist in search of a key to secrets, whose existence he can prove but whose solution has baffled men for generations.

The Rev. Father Cyprian, past eighty and custodian of a library not open to the public, aimed and still aims only at Hindu occultism. He regards it as the machinery of Satan, to be destroyed accordingly, and it was for that reason that he gave King, Grim, Ramsden and some others access to books that no human eye should otherwise have seen. For Father Cyprian collects books to be burned, not piecemeal but in one eventual holocaust.

Some lay brother peculiarly conscious of a sin appointed Father Cyprian by will, sole trustee of a purchasing fund, hoping thus to rid the world of the key to such evil as the Witch of Endor practised. For half a century Father Cyprian has been acquiring volumes supposed long ago to be extinct, and it is possibly the last phase of his beleaguered pride that he hoped instead of burning them piecemeal to make one bonfire of the lot and go to his Maker directly afterwards.

In that case even pride may serve appropriate ends; for if he had burned the books as fast as acquired, King could never have studied them and drawn conclusions. He took King, Grim, Ramsden and certain others into confidence subject to a stipulation; there were and are still said to be nine super-books whose contents total up the almost absolute of evil. King and his friends might use what Cyprian already had, and might count on his counsel and assistance; but if they should come on any of the nine books, those were to be Cyprian's to be burned along with all the others.

They were not to study the nine books, if obtained, and above all they were not to reveal their contents to any outsider; for Cyprian's purpose was, and is, to abolish the very memory of those books' existence and the deviltry they teach, or are supposed to teach. (For some say they teach wisdom.) But they might make what use they cared to of information picked up on the side, and they were free to deal with individuals as circumstances and their own discretion might dictate. Father Cyprian, in fact, cared and cares not much for consequences. He believes in cutting off the cause, and he is sure those nine books are the key which, if thrown away, will leave the cause of necromancy impossible to rediscover. So much for him.

Jeremy Ross came laughing on the scene, laughed with gay irreverence all through the piece, and still laughs, no more inclined to take life seriously than when he faced the Turks in the three-day fight at Gaza, sharing one torn blanket with a wounded Turk and destroying his chance of promotion by calling a British colonel "Algy" to his face. On the other hand, he was and is as unconquerably opportunist as when he tramped Arabia, lost, and survived by means of a reputation for performing miracles.

Jeremy's admitted motive was desire to learn more tricks and their underlying principles. He was and is convinced that even the "rope trick," so often told of and so invariably unconfirmed, in which a Hindu is supposed to climb a rope into the air and disappear, is simply the result of well-trained ingenuity.

"A chap who knows how can do anything," says Jeremy; and he proposed to learn how all the Indian tricks are done.

The motives he did not confess, but which were just as obvious as the laugh on his lips and the sunburn on his handsome face, were loyalty to Athelstan King and

Grim and Ramsden, a kind of irresponsibility that makes him plunge for amusement into every game he sees, and a bedrock willingness to fight every combination of men and circumstances for the right to be his own master. He has no use whatever for orders from "higher up," for swank, eyewash, stilts, inherited nobility, or what is known as statecraft.

"A diplomat's like me," says Jeremy, "only I call mine tricks and he calls his statesmanship."

It was enough that King and Grim had winded the stronghold of secret tyranny. Instantly Jeremy was game to make a pitched fight and a picnic of the business of destroying it; and he was quicker than either of them at penetrating the outer screen of commonplace deception. He got along remarkably well with Father Cyprian, in fact, astonishingly well, all things considered.

James Schuyler Grim is the protagonist of peace where there is no peace. His passion is to introduce two pauses in the strife of men where only one was formerly, and so little by little to give some sort of new millennium a chance. Arch-pragmatist is Grim. He holds men's lives, his own included, as worthless unless at work, and his highest expression of friendship is to pile task on task almost to the breaking point. He, too, resists interference from "higher up," but without Jeremy's turbulence and with much more wisdom—nearly satanic at times; which is one reason why Jeremy does not always mock him to his face.

Jeremy does mock Athelstan King, because King is of the seventh generation in the British army and respects accordingly the little odds and ends of precedent and custom that to the Australian resemble idol-worship. Jeremy was a trooper. King was a colonel but is now employed by the same multi-millionaire who furnishes supplies for Grim and Ramsden; in fact, he took Jeremy's place, for Jeremy cannot abide the power of purse-strings and would rather juggle by the roadside for his daily bread than yield to any man on the ground of surplus cash.

Jeff Ramsden is another independent, who rather prides himself on being slow of wit and heavy on his feet, whereas he is really a solid thinker, building argument on argument until he is convinced, and setting one foot down before he prospects with the other. He is stronger physically than almost any two normally developed athletes, but it would probably break Jeff Ramsden's heart to lose his comfortable savings, whereas Jeremy loses his last cent as cheerfully as he would win the other man's.

Then there are Narayan Singh, and Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam, soldiers of fortune both, the one a Sikh with pantheistic tendencies and the other a Pathan with seven sons. At any rate, Ali ben Ali is pleased to admit they are his sons, and none denies that he fought and slew the indignant legal owners of the mothers, although there are cynics in the crag-top villages who vow that Ali flatters himself. The mothers' statements (there were seven) made for the most part under duress shortly before death were not considered trustworthy evidence in the land that Ali comes from.

Ali has enemies, but is a man, whatever else; and perhaps the highest compliment ever paid Narayan Singh is that Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam respects him and would think three times before challenging the Sikh to fight, even if a mutual regard for Grim and King did not put quarreling out of the question. They are awfully disrespectful of each other's gods, but came to an early understanding on the basis propounded by Narayan Singh after a night-long argument:

"If your ridiculous Allah objects to my opinions why doesn't he smite me? I challenge him! As for thyself, Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam, thou art worth a dozen Allahs, being less cowardly, more generous, and not afraid to stand up and be seen!"

"It is a pity about you, Narayan Singh," Ali ben Ali answered nodding tolerantly. "I shall make a friend of you in this world only to see you torn by devils in the next. However, that is Allah's business, who is Lord of Mercies."

"Who is a big joke!" Narayan Singh corrected.

"He will turn thee into worms!" warned he of Sikunderam.

"Then I will gnaw the big thing's belly!" said the Sikh.

They agreed to postpone the debate until the next world and to be stout allies in this—a plan which if followed universally would abolish a deal of waste of time.

"For if I slew you, or you slew me," said

Ali ben Ali, "there would only be half our manhood left!"

And that was a point on which they could agree at once, for neither of them had a poor opinion of himself, any more than either cared a rap for Grim's and King's idealism. What they chose to follow was the men, they being men, and like attracting if not like at least its tribute.

But they were also attracted as much as Chullunder Ghose was by the glamour of the unknown quantity and the lure of fabled treasure; the babu being all acute imagination and alarm, they all adventurous.

Surely ancient sciences meant nothing to them; yet it was pursuit of ancient science and of nothing else that brought the twelve together, and that might have added the thirteenth if the number thirteen had not justified its reputation by proving fatal to da Gama the Portuguese. And that was no pity, but for scientific reasons.

He drank too frequently and inexpensively, and washed too sparingly to be good company. His appetite in all ways was a glutton's, drink included, and he took his erudition as he did champagne or beer or curried anchovies, in gulps.

Nor was he nice to look at—saffron, under shiny black hair, with a pair of coal-black eyes whose whites were yellow and red with long debauch—short—stout—asthmatic—dressed always in rusty black broadcloth and occasionally white drill pants, with black boots tied with broken laces. His face was seamed and lined with tales untellable and knowledge unfit to be known. His finger-ends were swollen and his nails close-bitten. His shirt, which might have been a petticoat for stripe and color, bulged through the gap between his pants and vest, increasingly untidy as the day progressed, and he hitched his pants at intervals. He had a little, black imperial beard that only half-concealed a chin cloven not by nature but by some man's weapon. The cleft had the effect of making him look good-humored for a second when he smiled. The smile began with a sneer malignantly, passed with a peculiar melting moment through an actually pathetic phase, and ended cynically, showing yellow eye-teeth. He had no idea whatever of making himself pleasant—would have scorned himself, in fact, for the attempt if he had ever tried it—and yet he blamed the world and did the world all the injury he could for refusing to love him. He always wore a round black hat like an English clergyman's, and never took it off, even indoors, until he was seated, when he held it rolled up as if he kept his thoughts in it and was afraid of spilling them.

IT WAS Chullunder Ghose who decoyed him into the office in the side-street off the Chandni Chowk, which is the famous Street of the Silversmiths in Delhi, and a good street if you know what goodness in a street consists of. Men—all manner of men—go by.

They had an office in a side-street, one flight up over a Maharatta drug-store, with the name "Grim, Ramsden and Ross" on a brass plate on the door. The next-door building was a warehouse for hides, hair, tallow, gum, turmeric and vicious politics, through the midst of which they had access to a back stairs by arrangement. But the front stairway by which you reached their office was a narrow, steep affair between two buildings, littered with fruit-peel and cigaret ends, and always crowded with folk who used it as a sort of covered grandstand from which to watch the street or merely to sit and think, supposing that anybody *could* think in all that noise.

You had to pick your way up-stairs gingerly, but going down was easier, because if you placed your foot flat against the back of a man's head, and shoved suddenly, he would topple forward and carry a whole row down with him, due to the fact that they sat cross-legged and not with their feet on the step below as Europeans would.

Existence there would have been precarious, but for Narayan Singh, Ali ben Ali and Chullunder Ghose—the first two truculent and the third a diplomat. It is fashionable nowadays to show contempt for Westerners by pushing them off the sidewalk and making remarks in babu English that challenge reprisals; so that, even though King, Grim and Ramsden can disguise themselves and pass for natives of the East, and Jeremy in plain clothes can make an Arab think he is an Arab in disguise, the firm's name on the brass plate would have been enough to start trouble, if it had not been so obvious that trouble would include a Sikh dagger, an Afghan *tulwar*, and the adder's tongue of the least compunctious babu in all India.

It was the babu's tongue that drew da

Gama past the door. He was afraid of it, in the same way that some politicians are afraid of newspapers, and it may be that he hoped to murder the babu as the simplest road to silence. All are agreed he was

surprized and angry when Narayan Singh, swaggering down the narrow passage, bunted into him as he stood hesitating and, picking a quarrel on the instant, shoved him backward through the office door. Inside he found himself confronted by the whole party, for Narayan Singh followed him through and locked the door at his back.

He stood at bay, in silence, for a minute, showing his yellow teeth, his hands making the beginnings of a move toward his pockets and repeatedly refraining. So Ali ben Ali strode up to him and, taking him in one prodigious left arm, searched him for weapons. He pulled out a long knife and a black-jack, exposed them, grinning hugely, in the palm of his right hand and returned them to their owner. There was no pistol. Then he pushed the Portuguese toward the office stool, which was the only seat unoccupied. Da Gama sat on it, putting his heels on the rungs, with his toes turned outward, whereafter he removed his round, black hat and rolled it.

The others sat around the wall on bentwood chairs, or otherwise as temperament dictated, all except Father Cyprian, who had been accorded the desk and revolving chair in deference to age. Cyprian held the desk-lid raised, but lowered it suddenly, and at the noise da Gama started, stared a second, and then swore in Portuguese between his teeth. None in the room understood Portuguese, unless possibly the priest.

"You recognize me, I believe?" piped Cyprian, almost falsetto, his little bright eyes gleaming through the wrinkles and his mobile lips spreading and spreading away into a smile that advertised amusement and was certainly a mask.

He has a face like a friendly gargoyle, full of human understanding and a sort of merry disdain that goes with it.

"Keep to your trade of mumbling Mass! What do these others want?" the Portuguese demanded rudely. "I have nothing to do with priests!"

His low-pitched asthmatic voice was an absolute contrast to the other's. So was his surliness. There was no connecting link between them but that one, swift, momentary cloven lapse from hardness as the Portuguese's face changed from one scowl to the next. But Cyprian recognized that and was swift, before the human feeling faded:

"My friend," he said, "it was you who tried to steal my library, and I have never sought to have you punished, for I know the strength of the temptation——"

"You are a miser with your books—a dog in a manger!" the Portuguese retorted. "You break your own law, which says you shall not hide light under a bushel!"

"It is darkness that hides!" the priest answered with another of his expansive smiles. "It was you, my friend, who tried to murder me—a sin from which I only saved you by being one inch to the eastward of your bullet's course."

"You lie like any other priest!" da Gama growled.

"No, no. Not all of us are rash. In fact, we—we all of us are—are occasionally careful. Is this not the pistol that you tried to shoot me with?"

He raised the lid of the desk again and drew out a surprizing thing born of the law against carrying firearms. It was a pistol built of springs and teak-wood, nearly as clumsy as the old museum holster pieces but as able as a cobra to do murder at close range. Da Gama was silent.

"My friend, I have not even blamed you," the priest went on, his thin voice squeaking with the rust of years. "I have pitied you, and as for me you are forgiven. But there are consequences."

"What?" the Portuguese demanded, betraying, between scorn and anger, once again that moment of human feeling.

"Something is required of him to whom so much has been forgiven," the priest answered firmly.

"What? the Portuguese repeated.

Jeremy reached for the pistol and began fooling with the thing, as pleased with its mechanism as he was impatient of preliminaries. Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam drew out his own long knife and thumbed its cutting edge suggestively.

"You for twenty-five, and I for fifty years have sought the same thing," the priest said, speaking slowly. "You have taken one line, I the other. Mine is best, and now you must follow mine, my friend——"

"For I cut throats with an outward thrust," Ali ben Ali interrupted. "The point goes in across the wind-pipe and the knife's heel separates the neck-bones."

It was horribly well spoken. Ali ben Ali failed in his youth for a Bachelor's Degree but passed in rhetoric. Da Gama shuddered.

"Peace!" commanded Cyprian.

"For the present," assented he of Sikunderam, stowing the knife away with its hilt projecting. For religious reasons he was careful not to show the alien priest too much respect.

"What do you want?" da Gama asked.

FATHER CYPRIAN reached into his desk and produced a little chamois-leather bag. Opening that he poured about thirty gold coins into his hands and held it out toward the Portuguese, whose eyes changed expression suddenly.

"The balance of those," said Cyprian, "and the nine books. You may have as much of the money as you can use, my friend, and you may have my share too, for I need none of it. But the books must be mine to do as I choose with."

Da Gama went through all the motions of his smile and ended on the usual sneer.

"No doubt! If you have the books you will need no money."

"I shall do as I please," the priest answered, not choosing to argue that point. "Do you know whence these came? Look at them."

He poured the coins into da Gama's open hand, and the Portuguese's dark eyes seemed to take fire from behind. None was of more recent date than a thousand years B. C., and one or two were of such soft gold that all the impression had been rubbed and squeezed away.

"The little bag—you know the little bag?" the priest asked, handing him that too. "You recognize it? Yes? You left that, you remember, with the money in it when you tried to shoot me, and my servant pulled your coat off. He would have captured you, but——"

Da Gama smiled again, beginning and ending meanly, on a note of insolence, but passing inevitably through that momentary human stage.

"But never mind," Cyprian went on. "You may have them back, except the gun. My servant shall bring your coat. You have been forgiven. But where did you get that money? I must know."

"Yes, we must all know that," agreed Ali ben Ali's deep voice, and the Northerner drew his knife again, thumbing its edge with a kind of professorial appreciation.

Grim, dressed as a Punjabi, had sat watching da Gama's face. Now he saw fit to betray that really it was he who was in charge of the proceedings.

"You understand?" he asked. "All that Father Cyprian asks for is the books."

"And you?" da Gama demanded, sneering again. It seemed to be his policy to get on terms with strangers by provoking. "You care only for money?"

Grim dug into the folds of his loose upper garment and produced a telegram from his employer in New York.

Investigate and report on perpetual disappearance of specie in India. Meldrum Strange.

He passed it to da Gama, who read it and cocked one eyebrow:

"Your alibi?" he suggested, pronouncing the word as if it were Portuguese, which for undiscoverable reasons made it more offensive.

Grim ignored that.

"We want to discover what has happened to the billions of dollars' worth of gold and silver that has been won from the earth during the thousands of years since mining was first commenced. The cash in circulation doesn't account for one per cent. of it. Where is the rest?" he explained.

"What if you find it?" asked da Gama.

"If you help, you may have as much of it as you can use," Cyprian interposed.

"Father Cyprian wants the nine books," Grim repeated. "He wants to destroy the knowledge that has enabled certain unknown men for thousands of years to drain the world of its supply of gold and silver. I wish to discover where the gold and silver is. You may have enough of it if your help amounts to anything."

"I also desire to know where the gold and silver is!" remarked Ali ben Ali, from his seat on a cushion in a corner. "I, too, desire enough of it!" he added, sticking his long knife point-downward in the floor and laying the palm of his hand on the hilt to stop its trembling. "My heart quivers as the knife does!"

It was easy to believe him. At that moment his gray-shot beard framed avarice and not much else, except the ruthlessness that gave it energy. His eyes contained the glint of morning on the Himalayan crags. Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam saw many visions at the mention of the magic name of gold and silver.

"I cut throats with an outward thrust!" he added meaningly, pulling up the knife again and glancing at the Portuguese.

Then Athelstan King took a hand.

"The same men who own those nine books keep the secret of the gold and silver coin," he said, speaking downright as his way is.

"How do you know?" da Gama sneered.

"Because like you I have devoted years to the pursuit," King answered; and in his eyes there was the sort of steely gray strength of the hunter who looks up-wind and into sunlight.

"Pursuit?" Da Gama was at his usual occupation, sneering. "Did you catch much?"

"You, at any rate!" King answered; and Chullunder Ghose observed the opportunity for self-advertisement.

"His honor having given orders to this babu—said babu having followed same," he smirked, wiping sweat from his hairy chest with a handkerchief, perhaps to call attention to the diligence with which he had labored.

Then he chose to emphasize and illustrate dexterity by throwing down the handkerchief and catching it between his toes.

"You're simply a prisoner," said King looking straight at the Portuguese.

"This," said Narayan Singh, on the floor beside Ali of Sikunderam, "is the writing of one Dilji Leep Singh, who swears that he helped you steal books out of a temple, but was never paid for it. He will be a witness if required."

Narayan Singh laid a paper on the floor just within range of da Gama's eye, and it was that that really turned the trick. He had imagination. He could see defeat.

"You may have a fair share of the money, if we find it with your assistance," Grim reminded.

"And I have forgiven you," added Cyprian.

"But I cut throats with an outward thrust," said Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam.

"Oh, what is it you want?" the Portuguese exclaimed, throwing up his clenched fists suddenly—theatrically. "Am I briganded and held to ransom after twenty-five years? All right! I surrender! Write down your promises, and I will tell!"

CHAPTER II

"Produce but the gold, thou Portuguese!"

BUT they wrote no promises. It was da Gama, desperate to the point of daring them to take his life and never sure that Ali ben Ali or the Sikh would not accept the challenge, who wrote down terms on a half-sheet of paper.

"——! There! My minimum! Without you sign that there is not a torture in the universe severe enough to make me talk!"

"Same being Portuguese opinion, anarchistic possibly! This babu risking personal humiliation volunteers advice—be skeptical!" remarked Chullunder Ghose, rolling off-center so as to reach the door of a small cupboard.

He pulled out a gallon jar of whisky and shoved it along the floor sufficiently noisily to attract da Gama's notice. Father Cyprian walked out, saying nothing, and Narayan Singh relocked the office door behind him.

"Advice not being asked, same tendered deferentially, which is—" said the babu, pausing—"give him one drink, subsequently withholding remainder of contents of gallon jar pending answers to questions. No water on any account!" he added, pursing up his lips.

The sweat broke out on da Gama's forehead. He was no hero, but *was* gifted with

imagination. As long as the priest stayed he had banked on that unbegged forgiveness, calculating, too, that the priest would tolerate no illegal violence in his presence. But Cyprian was gone, and he looked around the room. They all knew, and he knew they knew what the whisky torture meant to a man of his disposition. He shoved the crumpled half-sheet into his pocket and capitulated.

"What do you want to know?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Give him one drink," ordered King, and then, when the Portuguese had tossed that down his throat—

"Where did you find those coins?"

"In the ruins of a temple. I can not describe the place."

"Why not?"

"It has no name."

"You can lead us to it."

Da Gama nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I can lead, but you will find nothing. That is, I removed the gold —you see it. You may search a thousand years. I brought it all. I am intelligent—me. You have not the intellectual requirements. Yet I tell you, I know nothing—nothing! Only Cyprian the priest is capable, for he has books. But the fool thinks they are wicked, and he won't tell! He is a dog in a manger—a miser—a——"

"Never mind him. Tell us what *you* know," King interrupted.

"I know that none of you will live unless you cease from interference with the Nine Unknown!"

"Put that whisky back into the cupboard!" Grim ordered.

Chullunder Ghose obeyed. It was stifling in the office and for the second time the Portuguese capitulated.

"There is only one course worth trying," he said, trying to moisten his lips, which had grown dry at the mere mention of the whisky jar. His tongue looked a size too large. "You must subsidize me—support me. You must get those books from Cyprian and let me read them. You will all fail otherwise. I am the only man who ever lived who carried the search for the Nine Unknown the little way that even I have gone. I am the only one who found *anything*. They have made several attempts on *my* life. What chance would *you* have to escape them? Whisky please."

Grim shook his head.

"Then water!"

"Earn your drink," Grim answered.

"*Tshaa!* Well—it doesn't matter what I tell you! You will be useless without me. You lack the required intelligence. The problem is vertical, not horizontal. All the clues are cut off—blind from underneath. There—you do not understand that. What is the use of telling you? The Nine Unknown are at the top. That is a simple statement. Nine individuals, each independent, collectively forming a self-perpetuating board—each known to all the other eight but to no other individual on earth—not known, that is to say, to any other person in the world as being a member of the Nine. You understand that?

"Each of the Nine, then, appoints nine others known only to him, and each of whom supposes his principal to be merely a servant of the Nine. They think the orders they receive from him are second-hand orders, passed along. Thus, there are eighty-one first lieutenants, as it were, who think themselves to be second-lieutenants. And each of those eighty-one employs nine others, in turn known only to himself, making seven hundred and twenty-nine third lieutenants, each of whom knows only eight, at most, of his associates, but all of whom are at the service of the Nine, whom they know neither by sight nor name. You follow me?

"Every one of the seven hundred and twenty-nine third lieutenants has nine men under him, of his own choosing, each of whom again has nine more. So the chain is endless. There are no clues. If you discover, say, a fourth lieutenant, all he knows is the identity of the individual who gives him orders and, perhaps in addition to his own nine subordinates the names of eight associates, none of whom knows more than he.

"When one of the Nine Unknown dies, the other eight elect an individual to take his place. None but they even guesses that a vacancy was filled. None, except the Nine, knows who the Nine are. Each first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth lieutenant is responsible for nine; and they to him. Nothing is written. No muster-roll."

"How old is this organization?" King demanded.

"How old is India?" the Portuguese retorted. "How many dynasties have

thought they ruled? They levied taxes, and they all paid tribute to the Nine! If the money the Nine have received during all those ages had been invested at compound interest the whole world would be so awfully in debt that people would understand what has been happening and might possibly wake up. But there is wisdom in the books the Nine make use of—one book to a man, each book dealing with a branch of wisdom. They have simply hoarded money, letting the nations use gold as it is won from mines and only taking tribute of principal, not interest. Do you believe that?"

King, Grim, Ramsden and Jeremy nodded. Ramsden read aloud from a memorandum book:

"Last year the production of silver alone amounted to more than a hundred and sixty million ounces. The East absorbed more than a quarter of that——"

"And is howling for silver again!" said King. "Where did forty million ounces disappear to? There is some in circulation—not much; ornaments account for some of it; a little has been hoarded by the peasants, but it's less in these days of high prices and taxes; where is the balance?"

"I have none of it, Lord knows!" exclaimed Chullunder Ghose, holding up both hands with pious resignation.

"Where did it disappear?" said the Portuguese. "Here is some—" he shook the chamois-leather bag—"but all I found was leavings in a crack of a temple cellar, where they stored the tribute a thousand years ago."

"Nevertheless," remarked Chullunder Ghose, "India continues swallowing gold and silver in measures of *crores*, that which is swallowed not reappearing in any discernible shape, contrary to teachings of political economy, which being religion of West is probably poppycock possessing priests with check-books and top-hats. Where is gold and silver? That is whole point."

"Babylon had gold and silver," said the Portuguese. "Where is it?"

Jeremy took twenty sovereigns from his belt. (He always carries them, they constituting his uttermost reserve, never to be spent, but to be bluffed with.) He jingled them from hand to hand as if their music inspired him. Da Gama went on talking:

"*Always* India has imported gold and silver—always! But where is it? Some jewelry, but not much; the bracelets of one generation are melted by the next. A very small percentage disappears from wear. Of course, there is a little lost. A little more is buried and forgotten. But the balance—the accumulated surplus of at least six thousand years—I estimate it as a heap as great as the pyramid of Gizeh! And where is it?"

Chullunder Ghose blinked. Ali ben Ali drew his knife and stuck it quivering in the floor again. Narayan Singh breathed sibilantly through set teeth. Jeremy palmed his twenty sovereigns in a pile, and they all disappeared except one, which was fascinating; he did it again and again, and you couldn't tell where the nineteen were until he caught them out of air in his left hand.

"What became of the gold of Solomon?" da Gama asked. "He had so much of it. The records say men thought nothing of gold and silver during his reign. He died, and the gold went—where? Some say Solomon himself was one of the Nine Unknown——"

"Who says that?" King demanded.

"I for one!" da Gama answered. "But there are books. Ask Cyprian the priest. He has them. Where is the gold the Spaniards and the Portuguese shipped home from South America and Mexico? Where is all the product of the Rand and of Australia? They took seven billions of dollars' worth of gold and silver from the Comstock—just one reef in Nevada—yet tell me: how much gold and silver is there in the world today? The greatest hoard—greater than all other known hoards put together—is in the United States Treasury, and it doesn't amount to a hat-full compared to the total that is known to have been mined in the course of history! Where has the rest disappeared?"

"That's what we're asking *you*," Grim warned him; and Ali ben Ali drew the handle of his knife back and let go so that it hummed like a thing thrown.

"I must see the books that Cyprian the priest has," da Gama answered, looking at the knife and shuddering.

"They give no clue to the treasure," King answered.

Da Gama actually laughed, a thing he hardly ever did. It sounded like something

breaking. Jeremy laughed too, like breaking water, and palmed all twenty sovereigns with one sweep, instantly showing the same hand empty.

"The hand deceives the eye!" said Jeremy. "And I've seen written stuff that fooled a banker's clerk!"

"No book can fool me!" said da Gama, slapping his forehead and showing the cloven weakness as he smiled. "I know Sanskrit as Max Müller never dreamed of knowing it! Show me the books of Cyprian the priest and I will tell you where the treasure is!"

"You're talking rot!" said Jeremy. "If Father Cyprian has the books and they contain the secret, why can't *he* go straight and find the treasure? Eh? We wouldn't waste whisky on you!"

"Pardon me, but it is little whisky that you waste," da Gama answered. "As for Cyprian, the man is blinded by fanaticism. He knows a little Sanskrit—just perhaps enough to pass for erudition among ignoramuses—but he will not read what he sees. He is purblind."

"I read what I saw, and I know more than a little Sanskrit," King retorted quietly, but da Gama was more than ever cock-sure and sneered back at him.

"If Cyprian the priest were not a fool," he said, "he would have set his communicants to stealing books from me! For I have the keys to his books, and he can not read his without mine. And all my keys are good for is to fit the locks that he guards like a miser! Get me his books, and I will unlock their secrets for you in a week. In ten days I will show you such a heap of gold and silver as will make you mad! I wish to see you mad! Have no fear that I will disappoint you!"

Nevertheless, there was not one man in the room who would have dared place Father Cyprian's books in the hands of da Gama.

"Let's see; you have escaped the vengeance of the Nine how many years?" asked Grim, and da Gama laughed again. He saw the point.

"Bring us your books, and you shall compare them with Father Cyprian's," said King. "Thereafter, the books are his, but you shall have as much as you can use of any gold and silver found."

Da Gama hesitated. He had intellect, and worked it—prided himself on that. Few of the human passions, except drink and avarice and infidelity had any influence with him, so he reviewed the situation on its merits, being candid with himself. Like Grim, he sought no solace but results, and he would have wondered why Grim despised him, had he been aware of it.

"I can not bring my books," he said. "They weigh too much."

"We'll carry them," offered Jeremy.

"Give me a drink," da Gama answered, nodding. It was obvious he agreed, with a proviso.

The babu poured forth whisky into the office tumbler and presented it. Da Gama drank.

"We should have an understanding," he said, smacking his lips. "There was wisdom in the accumulation of gold and silver by the Nine. Don't disregard that. It all has to do with the *Kali Yug** and its end that was prophesied six thousand years ago. The purpose is to cheapen money by the squandrous abundance of it——"

"Krishna!" gasped Chullunder Ghose.

"—to abolish capitalism—do you see?" da Gama went on. "That will be the end of the *Kali Yug*. Capitalism is the age of darkness. To put in place of money—brains—intellect, that is the idea. To cheapen money by abundance, not of promises to pay, but of veritable gold and silver. Money being worthless, brains will count—intellect—you understand me? Have you intellect? No! Just habits! Have I intellect? Oh yes! But have I the reforming zeal? By no means! I am lazy. Let the world remain material and money-drunk; it suits me better! Can you accomplish anything without my intellect? No indeed. You can not understand the Sanskrit, which is a language of conundrums. You would turn the floods of money loose and create a havoc. Money would be worthless, and you no better off. In the books the Nine Unknown possess is the only secret of how to prevent the havoc. It means high thinking, and that is hard work—too hard. I say, let us take advantage of the money, and not turn it loose. Let the *Kali Yug* persist! Let us be rich—wealthy—affluent beyond the dreams——"

"Nay, nay! There is no affluence beyond my dreams!" said Ali, plucking at his knife. "I could use a million *crores* of gold and silver! I would buy the North—and build

*The age of darkness referred to in Sanskrit writings.

a city—and raise a *lashkar** such as Iskander's†—and—and speak not of millenniums! The world will burn my day out! Produce but the gold, thou Portuguese!"

"Produce the books!" said Grim.

THE Portuguese got down from the high stool and leaned his back against it.

"Are we agreed about the money?" he asked, looking from eye to eye for disagreement.

His was that disposition. He would promise anything to men in whom the seed of disagreement lay, knowing that the future would hold opportunity. But his wandering eye was fascinated by Jeff Ramsden's clenched, enormous fist. It seemed to symbolize. It was a totem. It did not stand for intellect, but it was heart-breakingly honest, neither Latin in its attitude toward a problem, nor cynical, nor unjust—not too credulous—just aboveboard, and direct, and faithful.

"Produce the books!" repeated Grim.

But he was dealing with the Latin temperament, which is not frank, reserving always little secret back-ways out from its commitments.

"I will go and arrange it," da Gama answered.

Whereat Jeremy did three tricks in succession with a coin, as if by way of illustration.

"I'll go with you," Ramsden volunteered. "I can carry quite a lot of books."

"No!" said the Portuguese, contriving to look scandalized in the way the Latin nations do when any one suggests a view of their back-yard. "There are my personalities. I mean, I am not a pip-show. I go alone. I will arrange. You may meet me. You shall have the books."

"I have seven sons," announced Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam, with his steel eyes focused on infinity, as if he were dreaming of his distant hills.

"Well—they would, no doubt, do to carry books," said the Portuguese, not understanding him.

Whereat Ali ben Ali got up and left the room, Narayan Singh locking the door again when he was gone.

The others understood that perfectly.

"Go and make your arrangements. Where will you meet us?" Grim demanded.

"Do you know my quarters? There then," said the Portuguese. "In an hour? No, that is too soon. I have books in one place and another. They must be collected. Come tonight."

"Leave one of those coins with me," said Jeremy. "You shall have it back."

Da Gama made a gesture of magnificence and passed the chamois-leather bag. Jeremy tipped the contents into his hand, and chose, holding up a coin between his fingers.

"What's it worth?" he asked. "You can have it when you like, but——"

"Write me a receipt for it."

Da Gama took a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket and straightened it out, smoothing the reverse side.

"This babu advising skepticism, as aforesaid! Safety first!" advised Chullunder Ghose, squirming nervously. "Same being ancient adage!"

"I get you," laughed Jeremy, and he waved aside the proffered sheet of paper, which da Gama pocketed again with an air of impudent indifference.

Jeremy produced an English five-pound note from his pocket-book and wrote his name on it.*

"Take it. I'll trade back whenever you say."

The Portuguese looked disappointed but folded the five-pound note on second thought and slipped it in the lining of his hat.

"So," he said tartly, "I can not make use of that one, since it is offered as security. If your excellency had another of the same denomination, to be lent me pending——"

King pulled out his wallet at once and produced the equivalent of five pounds in Indian currency notes. The Portuguese accepted them, and they needed no signature.

"*Gracias.* To be repaid, *señor.* Then we meet tonight—at my—ah—hotel."

He bowed magnificently, wholly unaware that the gesture made him look ridiculous. Narayan Singh unlocked the office door, and he backed out, continuing to bow, ignoring nobody, treating Chullunder Ghose to equal deference, the sneer on his yellow face giving the lie offensive and direct to his politeness, and he unconscious of it. He believed he made a most impressive exit.

*Army. †Alexander the Great.

*A formality usually required before any responsible party will cash a stranger's bank-note.

"He is thirsty—very thirsty. And he has five pounds," remarked Chullunder Ghose, as apropos of nothing as the Northerner's remark had been about his seven sons.

"Let's look at the coin," said Grim, and Jeremy passed it.

Grim is a numismatist, if a job in a museum at the age of eighteen can make a man that. They sent him to the Near East subsequently on the strength of what he knew. He shook his head.

"It's the same one Cyprian showed us. I've never seen one, nor a reproduction of one like it. I believe it's older than Cyrene. It's not Indian—at least, that isn't Sanskrit lettering—and it's better made than any of the earliest coins we know about. That might be a coin from lost Atlantis!"

"Pre-Adamite!" suggested Jeremy, but Grim was serious.

"I tell you," he answered as the door burst open and Ali of Sikunderam strode in, "we're in touch with the riddle of all history—the riddle of the Sphinx perhaps! Oh Lord, if we can only keep in touch!"

"By Allah, there are worse responsibilities than seven sons!" said Ali ben Ali, grinning. His grin sat crosswise of a black beard like sea-foam in the night. "If keeping touch is all your honor asks, then count it done!"

"Does a watched pot boil? or a watched thief steal? or a watched door open? Your sons will interfere with him!" remarked Chullunder Ghose, scratching his nose with an action suggestive of thumbing it.

"Bellyfull of forebodings! They have orders *not* to interfere with him," the Northerner retorted.

"Simply to watch?" asked King.

"Simply to watch him."

"Watch me!" said Jeremy. "Come close if you like."

He palmed the prehistoric coin in half-a-dozen ways in swift succession, making it move from hand to hand unseen, and plucking it at last from mid-air.

"I'll bet a fiver the Don steals a march on us," he said.

"He will steal nothing!"

Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam held up a hand as if declaiming in the mosque.

"My seven sons are the cleverest thieves that live! A thief can fool a non-thief, but not a professional. They are seven to one!"

But Jeremy laughed. Whereat Ramsden, bearded like the bust of Anthony, unclenched his fist and let go the burden of his thoughts. He was a prospector by profession, used to figuring in terms of residue.

"Forty million ounces!" he exclaimed. "Do you know what only one million ounces a year, say, for six thousand years would mean—how many trains of box-cars it would take to move it? It would need a fleet of ocean liners! Talk of secrecy's a joke!"

"Nine Unknown having kept said secret for six thousand years!" Chullunder Ghose retorted.

"And whose is the money by right?" asked Grim; that being the kind of poser you could count on him for.

"The fighter's—the finder's!" shouted Ali of Sikunderam, and Narayan Singh agreed, nodding, saying nothing, permitting his brown eyes to glow. And at that Chullunder Ghose looked owlish, knowing that the soldier wins but never keeps; sacrifices, serves, eats promises, and dies in vain. He did not tell all he knew, being a rather wise civilian. He sighed—Chullunder Ghose did.

"There possibly may be enough for all of us!" he said, rolling his eyes upward meekly.

Then Cyprian returned from strolling in the Chandni Chowk with that incurious consent of crowds conferred on priests and all old men—between the hours of indignation.

"You didn't hurt him? Children, you didn't hurt him?" he demanded. "Did he drink a little too much? Did he talk?"

King and Grim repeated what had happened, Cyprian smiling, shaking his head slowly—possibly because of old age, yet perhaps not. At eighty years a man knows how to take advantage of infirmity.

"The long spoon!" he said. "The long spoon! It only gives the devil leverage! You should have kept him here."

Ali ben Ali flared up at that, Koran in mind along with many other scriptures that assail the alien priest.

"My sons—" he began.

"Are children, too," said Cyprian. "I credit them with good intentions."

"They are men!" said Ali, and turned his back.

Then Jeremy, who has no reverence for any one or anything, but two men's share of natural affection, took Cyprian by the arm and coaxed him away to lunch at a

commercial club, promising him a nap on a sofa in a corner of the empty cloakroom afterwards. The ostensible bait he used was an offer to introduce a man who owned an ancient roll of Sanskrit *mantras;* but it was Jeremy's own company that tempted; Cyprian leans on him, and seems to replenish his ageing strength from the Australian's superabundant store—a strange enough condition, for as religion goes, or its observances, they are wider than the poles apart.

"All things to all men, ain't you, pop!" said Jeremy. "Come and eat curried quail. The wine's on ice."

"And there you are!" remarked Chullunder Ghose, as the two went out, illustrating the "thereness" of the "areness" by catching a fly on the wing with his thumb and forefinger and releasing it through the open window, presumably unharmed. "Matters of mystery still lack elucidation, but 'the wine's on ice!' How Anglo-Saxon! Wonderful! United States now holding greater part of world's supply of gold, and India holding total invisible ditto, same are as plus and minus—so we go to lunch! I dishonestly propose to issue bills of exchange against undiscovered empyrean equity, but shall be voted down undoubtedly—*verb. sap.* as saying is—brow-beaten, sat upon—yet only wise man of the aggregation. Sell stock, that is my advice! Issue gilt-edge scrip at premium, and pocket consequences! Sell in U. S. A. undoubtedly, residing subsequently in Brazil. But there you are! Combination of Christian priest, Sikh, fanatical Moslem, free-thinker, agnostic, Methodist minister's son and cynicalist, is too overwhelming for shrewdness to prevail. Myself, am cynicalist, same being syndicalist with opportunist tendencies. I go to tiffin. Appetite—a good digestion—a siesta. *Sahibs*—humbly wishing you the same—*salaam!*"

Chullunder Ghose, too, bowed himself out backwards, almost as politely as the Portuguese had done—indubitably mocking—giving no offense, because, unlike the Portuguese, he did not sneer.

CHAPTER III

Light and longer weapons!

IN THEIR day the Portuguese produced more half-breeds per capita than any other nation in the world; there are stories about a bonus once paid for half-breed babies. Their descendants advertise the Portuguese of Goa without exactly cherishing the institutions of the land that gave them origin. They have become a race, not black nor white, nor even yellow, but all three; possessed of resounding names and of virtues that offset some peculiarities; not loving Goa, they have scattered. A few have grown very rich, and all exist in a no-man's land between the rival castes and races, where some continue to be very poor indeed. Others are cooks, stewards, servants; and a few, like Fernandez de Mendoza de Sousa Diomed Braganza, keep hotels.

His was the Star of India, an amazing place with a bar and a license to sell drinks, but with a separate entrance for people ridden by compunctions. It was an ancient building, timbered with teak but added to with sheets of corrugated iron, whitewashed. Some of the upper rooms were connected with the cellar by cheap iron piping of large diameter, up which those customers who had a reputation to preserve might pull their drink in bottles by a string. Still other pipes were used for whispering purposes. In fact the "Star of India Hostelry" was "known to the police," and was never raided, it being safer to leave villains a place where they thought themselves safe from observation.

As happens in such cases, the Star of India had a respectable reputation. Thieves only haunt the known thieves' dens in story books. It was no place for a white man who insisted on his whiteness, nor for Delhi residents, nor for social lions. Nevertheless, it was crowded from cellar to roof with guests belonging by actual count to nineteen major castes, including more or less concealed and wholly miserable women-folk. The women in such a place who keep themselves from contact and defilement suffer worse than souls in the seventh pit of Dante's hell.

Nine out of ten of the guests were litigants in from the country, waiting their turn in the choked courts, tolerating Diomed's hospitality because it was cheap. The farce of caste-restrictions could be more or less observed. Intrigue was easy. You could "see" the lawyer of the other side. And as for thieves and risks, where are there none? The tenth in every instance was undoubtedly a thief—or worse.

There lived da Gama, pure blooded

Portuguese, greatly honoring the half-breed by his presence. Like the caste-women, da Gama kept within the stifling walls by day as a general rule. But, again as in the women's case his nights were otherwise. *They* went to the roof then, where such little breeze as moved was hampered by curtains hung on clothes-lines to make privacy. *He* went to the streets, and was absent very likely all night long, none knowing what became of him, and none succeeding in entering his locked, large, corner room.

That night King, Grim, Ramsden and Jeremy went to Diomed's hotel to keep their tryst with da Gama. They were dressed, except Jeremy, as Jats—a race with a reputation for taking care of itself, and consequently seldom interfered with; surly, moreover, and not given to answering strangers' questions. Jeremy wore Arab clothes, that being the easiest part he plays; plenty of Arabs go to Delhi, because of the agitation about the Khalifate, but he excited no more comment than the other three.

Mainly, in India, the religions keep apart. But that is where the Goanese comes in. He acts as flux in a sort of unacknowledged way, currying favor and abuse from all sides. There were in Diomed's Star of India hotel not only Sikhs and Hindus, but bearded gentry, too, from up Peshawar way, immensely anxious for the fate of women-folk they left behind them, but not so respectful of a Hindu's matrimonial prejudices.

So the roof was parceled into sanctuaries marked by lines of sheeting, each stifling square in which a lantern glowed—a seraglio, crossing of whose threshold might lead to mayhem; for nerves were on end those murderous hot nights, and lawsuits had not sweetened dispositions.

To the Northerners the quartering of that roof by night was pure sport, risk adding zest. They were artists at making dove-cotes flutter—past grand masters of the lodge whose secret is the trick of making women coo and blush before their husbands' eyes. And not even an angry Hindu husband takes chances, if he can help it, with the Khyber knife that licks out like Summer lightning in its owner's fist. So there were doings, and a deal of wrath.

King, Grim, Ramsden and Jeremy found da Gama's room and drew it blank. There was a key-hole, but it was screened on the inside by a leather flap that yielded when pushed with a wire without giving a view of the room. Some one—there was always some one lurking in a corner in the Star of India, possibly a watchman and perhaps not—volunteered the information that the "excellency *sahib*" might be on the roof.

Fernandez de Mendoza de Sousa Diomed Braganza, sent for, denied having a pass-key to the room or any knowledge of its occupant's movements. He, too, deliberately non-committal, suggested the roof and, deciding there was no money to be made, began to be rude. So Grim offered him fifty rupees for one look at the inside of da Gama's room.

"There is nothing in there," Diomed insisted.

Grim raised the offer to a hundred and then pretended to lose interest, starting away; whereat the Goanese chased all possible informers out of the passage, produced an enormous key, and pushed wide the two-inch teak door that was supposed to keep da Gama's secrets.

"I told you there is nothing in there!" he said, pocketing Grim's money.

He was right to all intents and purposes. There were a bed, one chair, a little table, half-a-dozen empty shelves, and a cheap old-fashioned wardrobe, from which such garments as da Gama owned had been thrown out on the floor. For the rest, a dirty tumbler, two empty bottles, a carafe, pens, ink, paper, a dilapidated dictionary and some odds and ends.

"Where are his books?" Grim asked.

"Gone!" said the Goanese unguardedly.

"Then there *were* books!"

"That is to say, your excellency, *sahib*—how should I know? Are you spies for the police? If so——"

Grim showed him another hundred-rupee note.

"I am a poor man," said Diomed. "I would like your honor's money. But I know nothing."

The eyes of a Goanese are like a dog's, mild, meek, incalculably faithful; but to what they are faithful is his own affair. He is likely not faithful to the world, which has broken trust with the half-breed too often for the shattered bits to be repaired. He was afraid of something—some one—and too faithful to the fear to take any liberties.

Nevertheless, the room was dumbly eloquent. It had been raided recently by men who were at no pains to conceal the fact. Even the pockets of the clothes were inside out.

"How many men came?" Grim demanded.

"*Sahib* — *bahadur* — your excellency's honor—I do not know! Are you spies for the police?" he asked again, and then smiled suddenly at the absurdity of that, for the police don't argue with hundred-rupee notes. "I will die rather than say a word!" he continued, and crossed himself.

"You know Father Cyprian?" asked Jeremy in English, so unexpectedly that the Goanese stampeded.

"You must all come out! I must lock the door! You must go away at once!" he urged. "Yes, oh yes, I know Father Cyprian—an old man—veree estimable—oh, yes. Go away!"

"Take my tip. Confess to Father Cyprian! Let's try the roof," said Jeremy; and as it was no use staying where they were the others followed him.

"You see," said Jeremy, pausing on the narrow wooden stairs, over his shoulder with one hand on the rail, "if he goes and confesses to Cyprian, Cyprian won't tell us, but he'll know, and what's in a man's head governs him. Better have Cyprian know than none of us."

THEY emerged on the roof into new bewilderment, for there were sheets—sheets everywhere, and shadows on them, but no explanation—only a pantomime in black and white, exaggerated by the flapping and the leaping lights. Somewhere a man sang a Hindu love-song, and an Afghan was trying to sing him out of countenance, wailing his own dirge of what the Afghan thinks is love—all about infidelity and mayhem.

"That's one of Ali's seven sons," said King, so Grim cried out, and the man came, swaggering between the sheets and breaking down a few as his elbows came in contact with the string, leaving a chattering rage in his wake that pleased him beyond measure. Nor was it one of the sons at all, but Ali of Sikunderam himself.

"Where is the Portuguese?" King asked him.

"My sons have him in view. I don't know just now where he is."

"Where are they?"

"That's just it. I don't know. They were to report here one by one, as each watched him for a distance and then turned him over to another."

"And none has returned."

"No, none yet."

"What have you been doing?"

"By Allah! Quarreling with Hindus. If you *sahibs* had not come there is one who might have found his manhood presently and made sport——"

"Have you watched da Gama's room?" demanded King.

"Nay, why should I? Who should watch a bat's nest! I have held the roof, where my sons may find me."

"Then you don't know who, or how many men went to the Portuguese's room?" Ramsden asked him.

"Ask the Prophet! How should I know! You heard me say I kept roof," he retorted. He had a notion that Ramsden was a subordinate who might be snubbed, because he said less than the others.

"Are your sons as wide-awake as you are?" Ramsden asked; and Jeremy, seeing his friend's fist drew deductions; he whistled softly and stood aside.

"My sons are——"

"The Seven Sleepers!" Jeff suggested, finishing the sentence for him; which was cartel and defiance in the raw code of Sikunderam, although Ramsden hardly knew that yet.

He learned it then. Ali whipped his knife out and sprang, being due some education too.

The knife went whinnying through the air and pierced a sheet, where it knocked a Hindu lantern out and was recovered presently. Before a hand could interfere or a word restrain them Ali and Ramsden were at grips. The hairy Northerner within the space of ten grunts lost his footing and began to know the feel of helplessness; for Ramsden's strength is as prodigious as his calmness in emergency.

As easily as he had wrenched the knife away Jeff whirled the Afghan off his feet and shook him, the way a terrier shakes a rat, making his teeth rattle and a couple of hidden knives, some cartridges and a little money go scattering along the roof—shook him until all the kick was out of him—shook him until his backbone ached and even his desperate fingers, weakening, ceased from clawing for a hold.

Then, holding him with one hand by the throat so that he gurgled, Jeff set him on his feet, reserving his other fist for such necessity as might arise.

"This had to come," he said. "Now—you know English—are we friends or enemies?"

He let go with a laugh and shoved Ali back on to his heels, ready to grip again if the other should choose enmity.

"By Allah! Wait until my sons learn this!" gasped Ali, rubbing the throat under his beard where Jeff's thumb had inserted itself.

"I will lick them two at a time when their turn comes," Jeff answered. "Now's your turn. What's *your* answer?"

Ali looked in vain for a hint of sympathy. The others stood back, giving the man of their own race full opportunity. There was nothing for Ali ben Ali to do but capitulate or fight. He did not stomach either course contentedly.

"If I say friend you will think I am a coward," he retorted.

"If you say enemy, I will know you are a fool!" said Ramsden, laughing; and that was additional cause for offense, for whatever you do you must not laugh when you speak of weighty issues with Sikunderam.

"You laugh at me? By ——"

Ramsden realized his error in the nick of time. Sikunderam would submit to being thrown off the roof rather than be laughed at.

"I jested with the thought that you could be a fool," Jeff answered.

It was lame, but it just limped. It gave the Northerner his chance to back down gracefully.

"By Allah, I am friend or enemy! Nothing by halves with me!" said Ali. "I am not afraid of life or death, so take your choice!"

"No, *your* choice," Jeff answered.

"Mine? Well, I have enemies and by Allah a friend is as scarce as an honest woman! Let these be witnesses. I call you friend!"

"Shake hands," said Ramsden, and Ali shook, a little warily because of the strength of the grip he had felt.

"You have the best of the bargain," he said, striving to grin, not finding it too easy, for he passed in his own land for a man who brooked no insult. "You are one man and I eight, for I have seven sons!"

"If they're included," answered Jeff, "that saves my thrashing them!"

"They *are* included, for the sake of thy great thews," said Ali. "Now they are yours as well as mine. Your honor is theirs, and theirs yours. We become nine!"

"Nine again!" laughed Jeremy. "If any one were superstitious——!"

Jeff thought of a superstition, and of Ali's knife that had gone slithering through the sheet and smashed a lamp. The Northern knife is more than weapon. It is emblem, sacrificial tool, insignia of manhood, keeper of the faith, in one. Jeff set out to find the knife and give it back doing the handsome thing rather more effectively because of clumsiness.

Seizing a handful of the Hindu's slit sheet, he tore the whole thing down, disclosing two inquisitively angry women and a man. The man was stout, and could not speak for indignation, but was not so bereft of his senses that he did not know the value of a silver-inlaid Khyber knife.

Jeff threw the sheet over the women, solving that part of the problem with accustomed common sense, and solved the other with his toe, inserting it under the indignant Hindu, who was exactly wide enough of beam to hoover the whole weapon under him diagonally as he sat still with his legs crossed. Jeff seized the long knife, picked up a corner of the bobbing sheet, pushed the Hindu under it to join his women-folk, and offered the knife to Ali, hilt-first.

"Thou art my brother!" exclaimed Ali, minded to grow eloquent. Emotion urged him to express his fundamental creed, and the easiest thing in the world that minute would have been to start him slitting Hindu throats. "Together thou and I will beard the Nine Unknown!" he boasted. "We nine will show the rest the way! By Allah ——"

He was working himself up to prodigies of boasting, to be followed certainly by equally prodigious feats, for that is how swashbuckling propagates itself; and no mistake is greater than to think swashbuckling is unimportant; the world's red history has been written with its sword-points.

"Thou and I——"

BUT there came interruption. One of his sons arrived, striding like a Hillman up the stairs and touching nothing with his garments, as a cat can go through undergrowth. A young man, with his beard not more than quilling out.

"Now we shall know!" said Ali, and King took the youngster's elbow, swinging him into the midst, where he stood self-consciously.

"Where is the Portuguese?" King asked him.

"The Portuguese?"

Ali of Sikunderam, magnificently posing, scratched his beard and grew increasingly aware of anti-climax as the meaning of the question was explained. The youngest of the seven sons with his spurs to win and no more than a murder yet to his credit seemed to be lagging behind opportunity—forgot—was stupid.

"Oh! Ah! Yes. That little yellow man—him with the little black beard and the black coat—da Gama—him you mean? How should I know where he is? Oh yes, I followed him a little way. But there were others, who left this roost with him, carrying books and rolls and things like that. One beckoned me and ordered me to carry books. Hah! He was a Hindu by the look of him,—a man in a yellow smock. Having received my answer, which was a good one, he acknowledged his mistake and paid me a compliment. He said he had not understood. He had been told that porters and dependable guards would come, and had mistaken me for a porter. He asked my forgiveness, standing in mid-street with his arms full of musty books—what sort of books? Allah! How should I know! Not a Koran among them, you may be sure of that!— I wasn't interested in his books—He said that men who would come from a house in the next street, who would seek to kill him, so would I go to that house—he described it to me, and an evil place it is—and obstruct the men who came out, quarreling if need be? Well—that was a man's work, and I went. I have just come from there."

"What of da Gama? What happened? Did you see the Portuguese?"

The questions came like pistol-shots in several languages—English, Punjabi, Pushtu, Hindustanee.

"No. I don't know what became of the Portuguese. There was a woman there—inside. I followed her in. Men came later, and I hamstrung one of them! When I can find my brothers we will all go to that house, and there will be happenings!"

There was nothing to be said. Not even Ali spoke a word. The youngster went rambling on, inventing things he might have said and deeds he might have done if he had thought of them at the time, until it slowly dawned on him that there was something lacking of enthusiasm in his audience. Ali did not even trust himself to utter a rebuke, and none else cared to. The vibrations of bitter disappointment—if that is what they are—made themselves felt at last, and the young man backed away, explaining—to himself—to the night at large:

"How should I have known? The man said *he* would carry books, and would I do the dangerous work? Am I a coward? How could I refuse him? And besides——"

There came two others of the seven—older men—hard breathing, breaking out in sweat, and anxious for news of Abdullah the youngest. They had seen nothing of the Portuguese at all. In accordance with a plan—a "perfect" plan as they explained it—they had waited in the appointed shadows to see the Portuguese go by. There were only six streets he could take, and they had watched one each, leaving the youngest to tag along behind the Portuguese and act as communicating link. Whichever way the Portuguese should take, the brother whom he passed would follow; and Abdullah, the youngest, would run to inform the others. The plan was perfect. The Prophet himself could not have devised a better one.

But Abdullah had not come. And another man *had* come, who said Abdullah was lying belly-upward of a knife-thrust in another street. So. They went to see, Suliman first finding Ahmed, so as to have company and help in case of a brawl. Not finding Abdullah they had come back.

"There is Abdullah," remarked Ali dryly. "Beat him!"

Which they did. Like the immortal Six Hundred at Balaclava, theirs not to reason why. They beat him to the scandal of a whole community that bivouacked on one roof, and rival roofs with no such violence to entertain them cat-called comment to and fro, casting aspersions on the house and good name of Fernandez de Mendoza de Sousa Diomed Braganza, who could

not endure that in silence, naturally. He came up on the roof to investigate.

Running into King and cannoning into Grim off Ramsden, Diomed recognized the strangers who had invaded his hotel, paying money for unprofitable answers, and undoubtedly not sent by the police. That was enough. The stranger is the man to turn on, because the crowd is sure to back you up. Besides, he had their hundred rupees, which probably exhausted that source of revenue—and the dry cow to the butcher, every time!

Striking an attitude that would have cheapened Hector on the walls of Troy with his straight black hair abristle like a parokeet's crest, Diomed Braganza called on the "honorable guests of his hotel" to "come and throw robbers off the roof,"—a dangerous summons on a hot night in a land where passion lies about skin deep and nearly all folk have a bone to pick with Providence.

There had been enough North country horse-play, and enough meek tolerance for once. The women's voices chattered like a hennery aroused at night, and the men responded, from instinct and emotion, which combine into the swiftness and the fury of a typhoon.

"I am your servant! I have tried to make you comfortable! These ruffians are too many for me!" shouted Diomed. "Come and help me, noblemen—my guests!"

They came with a rush, the nearest hesitating under cover of the flapping sheets until they saw and felt pressure behind them and the dam went down, not in a tide of courage but of anger with the racial rage on top, which is the swiftest of all, and the fiercest.

That was no time to argue. Ramsden took Diomed by thigh and shoulder, raised him overhead, and hurled him screaming and kicking into the thick of the assault, to create a diversion if the half-breed had it in him. And he hadn't! He had shot his bolt and served his minute. Three or four went down under his impact, but the rest ignored him as the spate screams past an obstacle. And there were knives—clubs—things thrown. Over and through and under all the noise there was a penetrating voice that prodded at the seat of anger:

"They are spies! They are government agents! *Bande Materam!*"*

*Hail Motherland!—the slogan of the Indian nationalist.

RAMSDEN held the stairhead for the others to back down one by one, King dragging Ali ben Ali by wrist and neck to keep him from using his Khyber knife that according to his own account of it had leaped from the sheath unbidden. (Ali was not the first, at that, to blame his true reaction on to untrue circumstance.) And even so, King only held him as you hold a hound in leash, until the moment—which occurred when Grim and Jeremy fell backward down the stairs together, struck by a bed hurled at random; wooden frame and loose, complaining springs that whirred like the devil in action. King dodged to avoid the thing, and Ali cut loose to uphold the testy honor of Sikunderam.

So there was a scrimmage for a minute at the stairhead that beat football, Grim and Jeremy returning, forcing their way upward to stand with their friends, and the others all in one another's way as each insisted on retreating last and all except Ali helped to plug the narrow exit. They had Ali's sons in the midst of them, for precaution, but that arrangement did not last long. Ali's Khyber knife was whickering and working in the dark a stride or two ahead, and some one reached Ali with a long stick, drawing blood. Ali yelled—not a call for help exactly, yet the same thing, "*Akbar! Allaho akbar!*" the challenging, unanswerable battle-yell of Islam, naming two truths, one implied—that "God is great" and that the witness of it means to die there fighting.

Might as well have tried to hold a typhoon then as Ali's three sons. There was one who had been beaten, with his pride, all raw, aspiring to be comforted in anybody's blood. He broke first, but the other two were only a fraction of a second after him, and there was a fight joined in the dark a dozen feet ahead, where men hurled broken lanterns, bed-legs, copper cooking-pots, friend hitting friend—where a fool with a whistling chain lashed right and left—and answering the "*Akbar! Akbar! Allaho akbar!*" of Sikunderam there rose and fell the "*Bande Materam!*" of some one prodding Sikh and Hindu passion.

"Hail motherland!" You can stir the lees of almost any crowd with that cry. Thought of retreat had to go to the winds as King, Grim, Ramsden and Jeremy hurled themselves into the fray to disentangle

Ali and his illegitimates, if possible—as all things, of course, are possible to men whose guts are in the right place.

Possible, but not so easy! It was dark, for one thing; all the lamps were smashed that had not been extinguished by the women, and Ali had deliberately struck to kill at least a dozen times, using the quick, upturning thrust that lets a victim's bowels out. There was blood in quantity that made the foot slip on the roof and, though it was impossible to see how many he had hit—and his own count of a hundred was ridiculous—there was no doubt of the rage for retaliation. The men in front were yelling to the men behind for light and longer weapons, and three or four came running with a pole like a phalanx-spear, while shouts from below announced that some had fallen off the roof.

Another shout, worse, wilder, turned that shambles into panic in which women fought men with their long pins for a footing on the stair.

"Fire!" And the acrid, stinging smell of it before the cry had died away and left one man—Grim—aware that he who had started the "*Bande Materam*" and he who had cried "Fire!" were the same! It was the note of cynicism—the mechanical, methodical, exactly timed note—the note of near-contemptuous understanding that informed Grim.

Not that information did him any good, just then. There was a rush of panic-stricken brutes, plunging deathward in the lust for mere life, screaming, tripping, scrambling, striking, tearing at the clothing of the ranks ahead; and the half-inch iron pipe that did for stairhead railing went down like a straw before it, so that men, women, children poured into the opening like meat into a hopper and there jammed, filling the jaws of death too fast! Others leaped on top of that, hoping to unplug the opening by impact, or perhaps beyond hope, crazed. There wasn't anything to do that could be done. No seven men in all the earth could tame that rush—not even Ramsden, who fought like old Horatius on the bridge across the Tiber, and was borne back on his heels until he swayed above the street and saved himself by a side leap along the low parapet.

Then the smoke came, billowing upward all around the roof, and a scream arose from the people jammed in the stairhead—song of a charnel-house!—hymn of the worst death!—and an obbligato made of crackling. Then the smell, as human flesh took fire, worse even than the screaming and the roar of flames!

Through all that ran a bellowing—incessant—everlastingly repeated—on another note than the mob-yell from the street and the brazen gong of the arriving firemen—penetrating through the screams and the increasing crash of timbers—giving a direction through the choking smoke as a fog-horn does at sea.

"Jimgrim! Oh J-i-m-g-r-i-m! Oh J-i-m-g-r-i-m! It is I—Narayan Singh! Come this way, J-i-m-g-r-i-m!"

Over and over again, unvarying, on one note, nasal, recognizable at last as bellowed through the brass horn of a phonograph—the summons of a sane man in a sea of fear!

Grim gathered the others. There was light now and a man could see, for the flames had burst the roof. Thirty or forty more of Diomed Braganza's guests swooped this and that way in a herd like mercury on a tipping plate, and one cried that the bellowing through the trumpet was the voice of God! That was the end, of course. Fatalism multiplied itself with fear and they leaped, hand-in-hand some of them, some dead before they reached the street and others killing those they fell on. Sixty feet from coping down to pavement—plenty for the Providence that governs such things!

"Jimgrim! Oh J-i-m-g-r-i-m! Oh, J-i-m-g-r-i-m! It is I—Narayan Singh! Come this way, J-i-m-g-r-i-m!"

Grim took to his heels and the others after him, running along the two-foot parapet because the roof was hot and smoking through—leaping the right-angle corner to avoid a flame that licked like a long tongue—making for the middle of the rear end, where the smoke blew back, away from them, and they saw a man like the spirit of the black night shouting through a brass phonograph horn thirty feet away from a roof across the narrow street.

"Jimgrim! Oh J-i-m-g-r-i-m!"

"Here we all are! What now, Narayan Singh!"

"*Sahib*, there is a ladder below you! Reach for it!"

Too low! Too late! The ladder lay dimly visible along a ledge ten feet below. They saw it as the roof gave in and a gust of flame scorched upward like the breath

of a titanic cannon, illuminating acres. All the secret tubes for conveying drinks and information in the "Star of India" were carrying draft now. The core of the inferno was white-hot. King's and Ali's clothes began to burn; the others' were singeing. Narayan Singh's voice through the brass horn bellowed everlastingly, emphasizing one idea, over and over—

"For the love of God, *sahib*, reach that ladder!"

The ladder was out of reach.

"I don't cook good!" laughed Jeremy, amused with life even in the face of that death. "I'd sooner die raw! Anybody strong enough to hold my feet? Not you, Jeff—you take his—it calls for two of us. Hurry, some one!"

JEREMY leaned on his stomach over the parapet. King seized the long Arab girdle, knotted that around his own shoulders so that the two of them were lashed together in one risk, and laid hold of Jeremy's heels.

"Over you go, Australia! You belong down under!"

Jeremy laughed and scrambled over. Ramsden laid hold of King's ankles, setting his own knees against the parapet; and to the tune of crackling flame and crashing masonry the living rope went down—not slowly, for there wasn't time—so fast that to the straining eyes in the street it almost looked as if they fell, and a scream of delighted dread arose to greet them.

Jeremy reached the ladder, grabbed it, and it came away, adding its weight and awkwardness to the strain on Ramsden.

"Haul away!" yelled Jeremy—not laughing now.

The turn-table motion of the ladder in mid-air was swinging him and King.

Jeff Ramsden's loins and back and arms cracked as he strained to the load. The others, obeying Grim, held him by the waist and thighs to lend him leverage, Grim holding his feet, in the post of greatest danger at the rear, where the flame roared closer every second.

"Quick, *sahib!* Quick!" came the voice of the Sikh through the brass horn.

Ramsden strove like Samson in Philistia, the muscles of his broad back lumped up as his knees sought leverage against the parapet and King's heels rose in air. (His legs would have broken if Jeff hadn't lifted him high before hauling him in.) Grim, unable to endure the heat behind, put an arm around Jeff's waist and threw his own weight back at the instant when Jeff put forth his full reserve—that unknown quantity that a man keeps for emergency. The ladder and the living rope came upward. And the parapet gave way!

It was Grim's arm around Jeff's waist that saved them all, for Jeff hung over by the thighs; the Afghans' hold was mainly of Jeff's garments, and they tore. The broken stone hit King and Jeremy, but glanced off, harming no one until it crushed some upturned faces in the crowd. And Jeff's task was easier after all without the stone to lean on. He did not have to lift so high. He could pull more. King, Jeremy and ladder came in, hand over hand.

"Quick! Quick! Oh quickly, *sahibs!*" came the Sikh's voice through the horn.

But the heat provided impulse. There was only one way to get that ladder across from roof to roof. They had to up-end it and let it fall, trusting the gods of accident, who are capricious folk, to keep the thing from breaking—they clinging to the butt to prevent its bouncing over. And it fell straight with four spare rungs at either end. But it cracked with the weight of its fall, and by the light of the belching flame behind them they could see the wide split in the left-hand side-piece. Some one said that Jeff should cross first, because his weight was greatest and the frail bridge would endure the strain better first than last.

Jeff did not argue, but lay on the ladder and crawled out to where the break was, mid-way. Across the midway rung he laid his belly—then set his toes on the last rung he could reach behind him—passed his arms through the ladder—and seized with his hands the rung next-but-one in front. Then he tightened himself and the ladder stiffened.

"Come on! Hurry!" he shouted.

They had to come two at a time, for the last of the roof was going and they stood on a shrivelling small peninsular beleaguered by a tide of flame. The Afghans came afoot, for they were used to precipices and the knife-edge trails that skirt Himalayan peaks, treading along Ramsden's back as surely as they trod the rungs. But King and Grim crawled, King last. And it was when Grim's hand was almost on the farther coping, and King's weight was added

to Jeff's midway, that the ladder broke.

Narayan Singh had turbans and loincloths twisted through the rungs at his end long ago, and had a purchase around a piece of masonry. So only the rear end of the ladder fell to the street. King clung to Jeff's waist while the other half swung downward against the opposing wall, and the thrilled mob screamed again. Jeff, King and ladder weighed hardly less than five hundred pounds between them. They went like a battering ram adown the segment of an arc, spinning as the turbans up above, that held them, twisted.

It was the spin that saved them—that and the madness of Narayan Singh, who snatched at the ladder and tried to break its fall with one hand! Both circumstances added to the fact that the ladder broke unevenly caused it to swing leftward. It crashed into the wall, but broke again above Jeff's hands, and catapulted both men through the glass of a warehouse window, where Narayan Singh discovered them presently laughing among bales of merchandise. They shouldn't have laughed. There were more than a hundred human beings roasted in the building they had left. Maybe they laughed at the unsportsmanship of Providence.

Narayan Singh was deadly serious, though unexpectedly.

"I watched the Portuguese! *Sahibs*. I *thought* these seven sons are not the princes of perfection they are said to be! They made a plan in that whispering gallery that you just left! But I kept my own counsel. I followed the Portuguese. I know where he went. The Portuguese has talked. The Nine Unknown are aware of danger! You are spied on. They knew you would come to this place. Some one in their pay set fire to the hotel, and said you did it! Their agents now are telling the mob to tear you in pieces! They say you are secret agents of the *Raj*, who set fire to the place because a few conspirators have met there once or twice! *Sahibs*, if you are caught there will be short argument! They saw you from the street. Listen! They come now! What shall we do?"

"Do? Track the Portuguese!" said King. "How's that, Jeff?"

"Sure!" said Ramsden, something like a big dog in his readiness to follow men he liked anywhere, at any time, without the slightest argument.

CHAPTER IV

"Here's your Portuguese!"

THEY escaped by way of the roof by means of the oldest trick in Asia, which is the home of all the artifices known to man. All thieves know it, and some honest men. You join in the pursuit. You call to the human wolves to hurry. You have seen the fugitive. You wave them on answering questions with a gesture, saving breath to follow too, glaring with indignant eyes, impatient of delay, but overtaken—passed. So, falling to the rear, you face about at last and, while the wolves yelp on a hot trail in the wrong direction, you walk quietly in the right one—yours—the opposite—away.

They found a stair down to the street through the house of a seller of burlap, who was edified to learn that they were authorized inspectors. He obeyed their recommendation to shut his roof-door tight. They took some samples of his goods to prove, as they said, by laboratory tests that the fire risk in his house was nothing serious, which made him feel immensely friendly. And out in the street they became customers of the burlap-merchant, hurrying home after a belated bargain—bearing samples—an excuse that let them through the fireline formed of regiments just arrived, whose business seemed to be to drive every one the way he did not want to go.

So presently, behind the drawn-up regiments, they threaded a thinning crowd toward the north, leaving the tumult and the honking motor-horns behind. The streets grew dimly lighted and mysterious, to Jeremy's enormous joy. His passion is pursuit of everything unconventional. They strode down echoing alleys where no European ever goes, unless there is a murder or a riot too high-tensioned for the regular police. They stopped and ate awful food in a place where sunlight never penetrated, drinking alongside surly ruffians, who sat on their knives in order to keep conscious of them all the time.

The way they took led by taverns out of which the stink of most abominable liquor oozed—raw, reeking ullage with the King of England's portrait on a label on the bottle—where women screamed obscenities and yelled in mockery of their own jokes—places where the Portuguese had led his night-life, and had not been loved. Time

and again Narayan Singh, with a sheepskin coat hung loosely on his shoulder as a shield, peered into a den—sometimes opium, sometimes drink was the reek that greeted him—to inquire whether the Portuguese had headed back that way by any chance. Invariably he was cursed, and certain gods were thanked, by way of answer. One could gather that da Gama was not liked even relatively in the places he frequented.

Narayan Singh, full of his office of guide, and proud of his accomplishment in having found and blazed da Gama's trail, visited every haunt the Portuguese frequented, talking between-whiles.

"It was here they sat, *sahib*—he and the man who gave orders to the others who carried the books. And the Portuguese told all about our meeting in the office, I listening, pretending to be drunk—so drunk along the floor they all but trod on me! Da Gama desired to play you on a hook, saying he needed money from you. Therefore the other said—nay, *sahib*, I never saw him before, and don't know who he is, but he wore yellow—the other said the Nine will give da Gama money, if he will go to a place he knows of, where he will discover it left in a bag for him. The Portuguese asked how should he believe that? and the other answered that neither the Nine nor any agents of the Nine tell lies for any reason; moreover, the other added that all you *sahibs* and your servants—by whom he meant Ali and his sons and me—will be roasted to death within an hour or two. So I rolled out of this *kana** into the gutter, which is cleaner, and as soon as I had watched da Gama to another place I ran to warn you. Let us only hope he has not escaped us between then and now."

"Can't!" laughed Jeremy. "He's no more than a shilling up a conjurer's sleeve! Process of elimination gives the answer."

So they harked along da Gama's trail into a rather better quarter of the city, where the ladies of undoubtful reputation ply the oldest trade without severely straining any caste laws. Priests live fatly thereabouts. Whoever entertains a Sikh, for instance, or Mohammedan, or Hindu of a lower caste than hers, may regain purity for payment—which is very shocking to the civilized, who only buy seats in the senate, or perhaps a title, or who "use their pull with the press" to hush up things the public shouldn't know.

*A word meaning almost any kind of place.

There, in a rather wider street, in a house that had gilded shutters, they sat cross-legged on embroidered cushions vis-à-vis to a lady sometimes known as Gauri, which is a heavenly name. She was pretty besides inquisitive, and the turquoise stud in the curve of one side of her nose contributed a piquancy that offset petulance. Her vials of vituperation were about full, and she outpoured almost at the mention of da Gama's name.

Know him? Know that slime of adders stuffed into a yellow skin? She wished she did not! But who were the gentlemen, first, who wished to know about him? Men whom he had robbed? Amazing! What a mystery, that such a *pashu** as that Portuguese could win the confidence of any one and steal as much as one rupee! Yet he had robbed her—truly! Her! A lady of no little experience— He had robbed her of a thousand rupees as lately as yesterday. He had laughed at her today! The beast had spent her fortune! Practically all her savings, except for a jewel or two.

And he had robbed others! Although it served the others right! Vowing fidelity to her—the brute—he had intrigued elsewhere, as she had only just discovered, coaxing other women's savings from them. What did he use the money for? To bribe the priests' servants to bring him old books out of temples—smelly old books full of magic and ancient history! *He* said that if he can get the right book he can find so much money in one place that all the rest of the wealth in the world wouldn't be a candle to it! She was to have a tenth of all that. She supposed he made the other women equally tempting offers.

As a rajah on his throne might feel toward a dead dog on a dung-heap, so she felt toward da Gama! She wished the Lords of Death, no evil, but she hoped they might have the Portuguese, nevertheless! He had come that afternoon and laughed at her! She had asked him for a little of her money back, and he had mocked her to her face! He had boasted flatly that she would never see one *anna* of her money back, and had then gone, mocking her even from the street!

Whereat Jeremy, adept at following the disappearing shilling, hinted to King in a whisper. So King made a suggestion, and

*Unmitigated brute having neither soul nor conscience—a very comprehensive Hindi word.

the priestess of delight blew cigaret smoke through her nose in two straight, illustrative snorts.

She—hide that *pashu* in her house—now—after all that had happened? There *was* a day when she had hidden him—a day born in the womb of bitterness, begotten of regret! How vastly wiser she would have been to leave him to the knives of the men he had robbed! He was always a thief. She knew that now, although *then* she had thought he was persecuted.

King made another suggestion, launching innuendo deftly on the ways of jest as he accepted sherbet from the Gauri's maid. She looked as if she wished the drink were poisoned, and retorted without any button on her rapier:

"Thug! You would like to search my house to steal the Portuguese's leavings! There is nothing! He took all! And it would cost me three hundred rupees to the priest to repurify the place if I let such as you go through it!"

Now a fool would have taken her statement at face value, believing or disbelieving as the case might be, and learning nothing. A clever fool would have paid three hundred for the privilege to search, learning that the Portuguese was not there, but otherwise no wiser after it. Wisdom, yoked up with experience, paid attention to the price she quoted and, not liking to be cheated, doubled the price and made a game of it. For, although *all* cheat him who buys, and *some* cheat the gambler, the odds against the gambler are so raised already by the gods that some folk let it go at that.

'Three hundred for the priest? I'll bet six hundred you don't know where the Portuguese is now!" said King.

Her eyes snapped.

"Tell for less than a thousand?" she retorted scornfully. "I am not a spy!"

'But I am a gambler," King answered. "I offered to bet. I will bet you five hundred you don't know where da Gama is this minute."

'You said six hundred!"

"Now I bet five. In a minute I reduce my stake to four. Next minute three——"

"I have no money to bet with," she answered. "Da Gama has it all!"

"Yet, if you were betting on a certainty you wouldn't lose, so you could afford to stake your jewelry," King answered. "I will bet five hundred rupees against that necklace of pearls that you can't tell me where the Portuguese is!"

"Who would hold the stakes?" she asked hesitating.

That was a poser, but Ali of Sikunderam was ready for it. He drew forth his silver-hilted knife and made the blade ring on the floor.

"You hold them!" he said, looking hard at her—up-wind, the way he was used to viewing the peaks of Sikunderam. "If my friend wins, I come to claim the stakes. I am old in the ways of women, and I come with this in my right hand! Only if you win you keep the stakes."

SHE judged his eyes, and understood, and nodded. King laid on the carpet five one-hundred rupee notes. She laid her necklace opposite. Ali of Sikunderam raked all the lot together with the point of his weapon and then pushed them toward her. She put on the necklace and folded the notes.

"I could send my maid," she said. "The place is indescribable."

But the maid of any such mistress as Gauri is more untrustworthy than treachery itself. Having nothing to lose, and the world before her, her eccentric trickery is guaranteed.

"I deal with principals. I bet with you," said King.

"I can not go there! I am afraid to go there! It is too far!" exclaimed Gauri. "It was my maid, not I who followed him. She knows the way. I——"

Ali of Sikunderam ran a thumb-nail down the keen edge of his knife, and Gauri shuddered, but it was Narayan Singh who voiced the right solution. He leaned over and touched the nearest of Ali's sons, who was day-dreaming over the maid's delightfulness—perhaps imagining her likeness in the Moslem paradise.

"Two horses!" he commanded. "Instantly!"

The youngster came to with a start and glanced at his sire, who nodded. King produced money. Gauri claimed it.

"Let the owner of the horses send his bill to me!" she insisted, and nearly enough to have bought two horses disappeared into a silken mystery between her breasts.

So Ali's youngest went on an errand he could run without much risk of tripping up,

but "instantly" is a word of random application and he was gone an hour before the horses stood incuriously at the door perceived by half-a-hundred very curious eyes; for the doings of a lady such as Gauri are of deeper interest than chronicles of courts.

It was not until Ramsden came forth, bulking like a rajah's bully, and the others formed up like the riff-raff hirelings who attend to the unprintable pursuits of aristocracy, that the crowd went its way to imagine the rest and discuss it over betel-nut or water-pipes.

Gauri ceased expostulating when it dawned on her that she would ride escorted by nine assorted footmen. That is an honor and a novelty that comes to few of her position on the stairs of disrepute. And then, there was intrigue, that was meat and drink to her. There was the possibility—the probability of venomous revenge; and a bet to win, if no chance of her money back from the Portuguese.

She began to try to stipulate before the hour was up.

"If I find him for you, you must kill him!" she insisted.

"If you don't find him, you lose your necklace," King retorted.

"What if he tells you his secrets?" she said suddenly. "The *pashu* will be afraid. He will tell the secret of the treasure! He has had ten thousand rupees of my money! You must tell me what he tells you——"

She grew silent—looking—reading men and faces, as the third of her profession was. King's eyes had met Grim's and the glance passed all around the circle—not of understanding, but unanimous. They recognized a chance, and without speaking all accepted it. So King conceded terms:

"Daughter of Delight," he said, "if in obedience to us you help find treasure, you shall have your share of it."

"How much?" she demanded.

But it is wiser, if you want to shorten argument, to let East's daughters bear the market for themselves.

"How much do you want?" King asked and she named the highest figure she could think of that conveyed a meaning. (*Crores* look nice on paper but are over ambition's head.)

"A *lakh*!" she said, laughing at her own exorbitance.

"Good! If your help is worth an anna you shall have a *lakh* of rupees!" King answered.

She demanded, naturally, two *lakhs* after that, but Ali of Sikunderam declaimed on the subject of unfaithfulness. A *lakh* she had said; a *lakh* she should have; his Khyber knife was there to prove it! He was as vehement as if they had the treasure in the room with no more to do than divide it, and she capitulated, more fearful of Ali's Northern knife than of all other possible contingencies. She understood the glint in those eyes that were the color of the breeding weather.

"A *lakh*," she agreed; and then the horses came, and fiscal whispers had to be exchanged between the owner of the horses and the maid, who indubitably swindled everybody, though she had to part with a "reward" to Ali's son, that being India—specifically Delhi and the seat of government, where extortion is the one art that survives. The horses were an illustration—crows' meat, hungry, made to labor for a last rapacious overcharge.

But nothing more was required of the horses than a walking pace. The two veiled women rode them in the midst of men who were in no haste, because to seem to hasten is to draw attention. It was better to swagger and invite attention, which has a way of producing the opposite effect.

THEY headed as straight as winding ways permitted toward the northern outer fringe of Delhi, where the ruins of the ancient city lie buried amid centuries' growth of jungle. Not a tiger has been seen in that jungle for more than thirty years, but few care to wander at night there, for everything else that is dangerous abides in that impenetrable maze, including fever and fugitives from justice.

As they left the last of the modern streets the moon rose and they followed a track that wound like the course of a hunted jackal between ancient trees whose roots were in much more ancient masonry. The "servant of delight," as she preferred to call herself since her mistress was what she was, led with King's hand on her bridle-rein, recognizing the route by things she was afraid of—ruins shaped like a human skull that drew a scream from her—roots like pythons sprawling in the way—a hole in a broken wall that might be a robber's entrance—terrified, and yet employing terror consciously—enjoying it, as some folk like to sit in a rocking boat and scream.

Life to amuse her had to raise the gooseflesh and offend the law, both of which are accomplishments of night in northern Delhi; so her faculties were working where another's would have turned numb.

They came at last to the world's end, where a shadow blacker than a coal mine's throat declared that life left off, and might have been believed except for moonlight that glistened beyond it along the ragged outline of a broken wall. There, under the bough of an enormous tree, whose tendrils looked like hanged men swinging in the wind, they turned into a space once paved so heavily that no trees grew and only bushes strangled themselves, stunted, between masonry. On the far side was a building, still a building, though the upper part had fallen and the front looked like the broken face of a pyramid.

Once it had been magnificent. The outside and the upper portions had collapsed, from earthquake probably, in such way as to preserve the middle part like the heart of an ant-heap. Partly concealed by bushes was an opening indubitably dug by men through the débris. That they entered, into a tunnel that was once a corridor open on one side to the air. And at the end of fifty dark yards, guided by matches struck two at a time, they turned to the left into a hall, whose marble sides had been quarried off long ago, but whose columns were still standing like rows of twisted Titans holding up the world's foundation.

There was a platform at one end, on which had stood a throne. But on it now were a canvas camp-bed, an old black handbag with a dirty shirt in it, a couple of pairs of filthy blankets, and a lantern. Some one lighted the lantern, and about a million bats took wing; the air was alive with them, and the women hugged their heads, screaming.

A few opened tin cans tossed into a corner showed how some one had contrived his meals; and one meal at any rate was recent, for there was unspoiled soup remaining in a can beside the bed. But no sign of the Portuguese. Not a hint of where he might be. Only the certainty that he had been there that day! There, on the bed, turned inside out and empty, lay the chamois-leather bag that Cyprian had given back to him; but there was no more trace of the coins that had been in it than of da Gama.

Narayan Singh was the first to speak:

"Da Gama came for money, *sahibs*. I heard the boast made that the Nine never lie." He seemed afraid his own word might be doubted since they hadn't found da Gama. "Nevertheless—the money that we know he had is missing—gone—where?"

He picked up the chamois-leather bag and shook it.

"Up somebody's sleeve!" chuckled Jeremy. "Look for the Don and I'll bet you——"

He spoke English, and the women's exclamations stopped him.

Ramsden went looking, not so talkative but bashfully aware, as big men sometimes are, of strength and an impulse to apply it. It was foolish to go looking in an empty hall, but men who don't pride themselves on intellect occasionally are better served by intuition. He stooped over where a solitary section of a broken marble column lay on top of débris in a corner of the floor, and they heard his joints crack as he shoved the marble off the heap.

"Here's your Portuguese!" he said quietly.

He might have found a golf-ball. But he, too, spoke English and the women exclaimed at it. The maid seized hold of Jeremy's hand and began to examine his finger-nails, which inform the practised eye infallibly; but Jeremy snatched his hand away and hurried to hold the lantern and look with the rest at what Ramsden had discovered.

The yellow rays shone on the body of the Portuguese laid dead and hardly cold in a shallow trench hoed in the rubble. The marble column had closed it without crushing what was in there, and the corpse was smiling with the funny, human, easy-natured look that the man had worn in life for fragments of a second as he passed from sneer to sneer. He had died in mid-emotion, and the women vowed the gods had done it. They promised the gods largesse to save them from a like fate.

There was no other explanation than theirs of how he died, nor of who else than the gods had killed him. They searched the body. There was no wound—bruise—no smell of acid poison—no snake-bite—nothing, but a corpse with a scarred chin, smiling! And no hat!

TO BE CONTINUED

Back Pay—

by Arthur M. Harris

PIRATE TALES FROM THE LAW—AVERY

Author of "Black Flag from Boston," "Sea Horror," etc.

JUST outside of Plymouth, in the English county of Devonshire, John Avery kept a tavern, under the patronage for the most part of coastwise and deep-sea sailormen. It was a comfortable place, was that inn of good Master Avery, with its sanded floor, diamond-paned windows, clean tankards and the good ale and victuals that made the house synonymous with home for the parched mariner off in Malabar or his brother expectantly bumping homeward-bound around the bulk of Africa's majestic cape.

A good place with a good landlord, but, alas for perfect pleasure, with a landlady not so good. For while mine host endeavored to drink as much as his customer, leaving the score an amicable affair between gentlemen, mine hostess tallied every drink and clawed every broad penny laid upon the table. And how incompatible boozing and bookkeeping are, every one may be presumed to know.

Jack and his wife had one child, a boy whom they called Harry. Perhaps it was for the sake of her son that Mistress Avery was careful to parsimoniousness, for the parents were resolved that Harry should neither follow the sea nor pursue the occupation of a tavernkeeper; he was to be a scholar and a gentleman and thus to raise the family at least one higher rung on the social ladder. A straw, it is said by wise people, may show which way the wind blows, and a circumstance which occurred when Harry Avery was but six years old may perhaps suggest his possible fulfilment of his parents' hopes.

For it was when Harry was of those tender years that the ship *Revenge* paid off at Plymouth, the boatswain of which, at the head of some proper fellows, at once started for Avery's tavern, to drink

IN TAKING these pirate tales from the law recourse has been had to the most authentic sources of the subject—the verbatim reports of the court proceedings in which the pirates here portrayed were prosecuted. So far as we are aware, this is the first popular presentation of the subject of piracy from this point of view. This derivation of these articles makes for the special informative value of the series. You have here the accounts of this picturesque class of sea-brigands as the activity of each has been determined by the examination of witnesses, the arguments of counsel, the instructions of judges and the verdicts of juries. In comparison with these records, the narratives of lay writers on the subject of piracy were frequently found to contain mistakes. Where collateral history has been consulted to necessarily supplement matters not concerned in the trials, the most authoritative has been sought.

The technical trials themselves may be likened to maps; these stories to paintings faithfully following the maps.

up a stout wallet of money. With Jack Avery's company and Mrs. Avery's accounting they soon got through with ten pounds apiece.

During the sailormen's besotted sojourn at the tavern little Harry gamboled impishly among them, swinging sea-slang backward and forward with them, dancing a mimic hornpipe and convulsing them with the expert manipulation of the most approved sea-swearing. They prophesied that he would make a good sailor.

Unhappily all this cheeriness departed with their last groat. Mistress Avery turned sour then and bade them begone or she would turn in a riot call to the constable. Night was falling when the groggy seamen piled out to the chilly street to seek the shelter of the gloomy *Revenge*.

But that ship, alas, was not in the harbor. They huddled together and stared first at the vacant harbor and then at each other. Marooned, by tar!

They tacked back to Jack Avery's, but that gentleman's shrewish wife met them at the door with the sharp refusal of even a poor night's lodging in the stable. Little Harry, in the prettiest way, interceded for these interesting strangers, but in vain—they had to warm themselves as best they might by stamping through the town the whole night long.

With the morning, however, the *Revenge* came back, and the boatswain led his now embittered flock to the waterside. On their way they were met by little Harry Avery, nimble and frolicsome as ever. He followed them to the boat which had put off from the ship to fetch them, and wished so loudly that he might go aboard and away with them!

Whereupon the boatswain had a happy thought. Pushing back his three-cornered hat, he scratched his mahogany forehead in deep reflection. Why not take the boy aboard and thus get even with the hard-hearted Mrs. Avery? Everybody roared with glee when this scheme of revenge was broached. Harry was pulled by a great fist into the boat, and his sea-adventures were begun.

Safely on their way to the American plantations and well out of sight of land, the boatswain produced his kidnaped pal, who apparently accounted the whole thing the very best joke in the world. For a moment the captain glowered down on his peculiar passenger; but when Harry showed how he could roll out two oaths to the boatswain's one his fare was paid, and the captain looked upon him almost with affection.

So bright a little blackguard was Harry that he stole more and more into the grim captain's heart and twined his wicked little fingers still more firmly about the skipper's starved emotions. A tiny hammock was made for him close by the captain's bunk; he was allowed the run of the ship, and the cook was admonished to keep for him the least weevilly or oaken portions of the menu. It was a charming sight to see the small chap, perched on a coil of rope, in blasphemous competition with the admiring skipper.

There is no telling how far this friendship might have gone, nor whether the captain of the *Revenge* might not even have adopted him for his own son, had not an incident, as they neared Carolina, severed the comradeship sharply in two. Harry was caught in the act of putting a lighted match to the powder magazine—just an inch more and the ship would have been nothing but a few broken spars and gratings drifting haphazardly upon the sands of the Carolina beach.

The captain turned nasty right away. He banished his little pet into the hold, down among the bilge and the rats, and kept him there till they made port. Rather unkindly he gave the boy to a Carolina planter—unkindly, of course, not to the boy.

It took the planter three years—for he was a man of monumental patience—fully to realize the nature of the gift; and as he could not wish Harry off on anybody in the colony, the boy's talents being pretty commonly known, he did the best thing he could and sent him back to England.

Old Jack Avery had died soon after the boy's leaving England—some said of a broken heart. What contact Harry made with his mother is not recorded, but it has become a matter of history that young Avery grew up a rogue, and at length, finding the land too hot for him, sought the cool and obscure promenades of his first element—the sea.

If he belonged anywhere it was to the sea. He even qualified as a navigator with the rank of first mate. In the sixteen-hundred and nineties, the Spanish Government made a bargain with some English

merchants to hire coast-guard ships for its troubled South American colonies. Sir James Houblon and several others outfitted a couple of brigs, the *Charles the Second* and the *James*, for the Spaniard's business, and it was on the former that Avery was signed as first mate.

Thereafter things came about which made a matter for the King's court of Old Bailey, sitting in admiralty. Among the persons involved was an ancient mariner by the name of William May, who on his trial has left us a story of the wickedness of Mr. Avery. Unfortunately Harry Avery was not brought to account for this crime, nor, so far as we are aware, for any piracy, but slips from the pages of history with these things unrecorded, probably to end his life as one, not the least evil, among the buccaneering hordes of the Caribbean.

I

LOOK at the sad plight of me, old Bill May, for thirty-five years in the service of my king and country! Here I lie in the hold of Newgate Gaol, condemned for a pirate and a-tremble like a loose sail in a gale of wind every time the sheriff comes in to read off the list of those appointed for the day to die.

My right forefinger and the top of my thumb I lost just thirty year ago when Admiral Tiddiman fought the Dutch in the harbor of Bergen. On the *Hector*, Captain John Cuttle's ship, I was. We ran afoul a Dutch broadside, and down we went like a tub with a grindstone in it. Only a score of us came up again, and me, with my maimed hand, had to swim more than an hour for my life.

A man who has given his limbs for his country to be stretched at Execution Dock with no more to do than if he were a common picklock! Ah! What a port has old Bill May's ship come to at last!

It does not become a man who has fought for England to whine at the King's court. But charity begins at home; and from a kindness to the respectable name of May I am taking a quill in my fist to set out in order the things that brought me here—and shouldn't have—which things the lawyers confabulated me out of properly telling at my trial.

The way the long-gowns* talked you would have thought they and not we were the ones to be hanged. Begging everybody's pardon, I ask who ought to do the most talking—accuser or accused?

His Lordship, Judge Holt—who was master of the court—was pretty fair, but those King's counsel blasted the whole bewigged row of judges with words, words, words till I looked to see them all blown through the wall of Old Bailey—and the big bench with 'em. Half the time those lawyers didn't speak a man's English, but yammered in a foreign tongue, calling us names we knew not what. Some of it sounded to me like Portugee.† Jack Sparkes‡ swore from keel to truck it was Irish. But when we came to talk, how was it then?

"Speak to the point, my man."

And, "What have you more to say?"

If we had had anything to say, how could we have said it with no lawyer to pilot us over the law language and to throw outlandish words back at our prosecutors?

Nay, more. From jury to judges they were all landcrabs. Asks Judge Holt—

"What do you mean by 'conning a ship'?"

Begging their honors' pardon, I ask: Could that be a fair trial for sailormen? A baby at the breast ought to know that conning a ship is a-steering of her.

Did I have to ship on the *Charles the Second?* Was I pressed? Never has the press-gang picked up old Bill May when he was sober. How often have I led the gang myself! Who was it grabbed half a score knock-kneed apprentices for the *Hector* and other of the King's ships under Admiral Tiddiman? Only Bill May, the pirate.

No, indeed. Captain Brake of the *Wave*, East Indiaman, was begging me to voyage with him to Calicut, but I said, "No, here is Sir James Houblon outfitting *costa-gardas* for the Spanish South Americas; here," said I, "is where they need men who can keep an edge to a cutlas, and where I am wanted there I always try to be."

I was wanted at Bergen against the Dutch thirty year ago, and there I was—as witness my finger and thumb.

Very well, then; here is the start of the affair.

*Lawyers.

†Law Latin: "*Hostes humanis generis*," etc.

‡A co-defendant.

MR. DON SPANIARD could not keep a strong hand on the pirate people himself over in South America, so he comes to England to hire ships and men to go out and help clean his coasts of those pests. Sir James Houblon and some other merchants strike a bargain with Mr. Don Spaniard, and fit out the *Charles the Second* and the *James*.

I was lying alongshore getting my mind ready to sign with Master Brake on the *Wave* when I heard this Spanish affair talked about in the "Pig's Head," Bristol. As I say, Bill May is never too old to fight on a good side, so I made for the docks straightway and offered myself to Mr. Gibson, master of the *Charles the Second*. An old Navy man he was, and knew me in the past, so he gave me his hand and the rating of quartermaster.

Henry Every* was first mate under Captain Gibson, and Mr. Gravet was second mate. A new man to me was Every, but a pleasant, merry one, about forty years old. Not even, though, in his mind. Why he would stand by me while I was at the whipstaff† and make me laugh like to throttle myself at the quips that came from him as shot from a well-greased ten-pounder. But a minute later he would be cursing the sea, ships, sailormen and his own hard luck. Time and again he said to me—

"I'm a man of fortune, and my fortune I'm going to make."

Queer-like, he spoke, and queer-like I took it. But I never dreamed he was meaning to do a mischief to make his fortune.

Born for the sea he was, and knew a ship like you know the palm of your hand. Hard, too, he could be; I have seen him knock a man to the deck and never leave off laughing.

Strange laugh he had; up in the back of the nose, as it were, and panting like—sort of a snorting. Between us, though, there was no trouble; Henry Every always said I was the properest quartermaster he ever shipped with. He couldn't bear Gravet; they did not hitch, though nothing outwardly passed from one to the other.

Our orders were first for the Groyne‡ in Spain, there to get instructions and supplies. The *Charles the Second* and the *James* left England in the Autumn of 1693, and about the new year following we dropped our anchors in the Spanish port. Bad weather had made a job of slow sailing and hard pumping all across the Bay of Biscay, but we cheered ourselves with promises of ease when we should come to the Groyne.

All hands had four months' wages due them when we came to port, but not a mother's son of us could get a penny piece

from the commander. The Spaniard is as sluggish in money matters as a waterlogged ship with a broken mast.

There grew to be a lot of hard feeling on both ships, and the two captains, Gibson and Humphries, were much pestered to their faces and much abused behind their backs. I could not see how they were to blame, but they were the only ones the men could look to for their pay and so they had to bear the siege. January came and went; February came and went, March came and went, and April likewise; and not a smell did we get of coin, either Spanish or English.

The sailors at length quit going ashore to be jeered for their poverty and taunted for their misfortune, but moped about the decks and fought with one another, and altogether got to a mischievous turn of mind. Every and Gravet gave plenty of way to each other, while as for my old commander, Captain Gibson, he broke with the worry of it all and took sick to his cabin. Little winds blow ships into strange ports; if the Don had met us with our pay old Bill May's neck would never have been hauled upon like a mainsail.

*Old spelling for Avery.
†Helm.
‡Old name for Corunna.

II

IF THE men had a friend among the officers, it was Mr. Every. I thought to see him turn sour with this slow making of his fortune, but not he; the farther into the doldrums we got, the higher he flew his topsail. He praised and petted the crew, spent some money on them, went ashore with them and even made chief cronies of a dozen or so, of whom I am sorry to say that some of my fellows in this condemned hold were a part.

He loitered, too, a good deal over on the *James*, which barnacled a few lengths from us, and made as good friends there as he did on his own ship. When the month of May began there was always a confabulation going forward, with Mr. Every in the middle of it and certain chosen ones about him. And all the time my old commander lay greviously sick in his bed.

How could I have any idea Mr. Every was stewing a mutiny? Yet so he was. On the 30th of May, in the year 1694, I was at evening in my cabin, thinking of home and wishing I had my wages to send to my poor, good wife at Bristol. At between ten and eleven of the night I felt the ship move.

"Ho!" thinks I. "What does this mean?"

I rushed out in my shirt and stockings to the under deck and from there up the hatchway. The wind hit me full in the face, and I could see the lights of town dropping astern.

I stuck my head up over the hatchway—there was Every conning the ship.

"Breakers ahead!" thought I. "Yaw away, old Bill May, afore you strike."

Every saw me at that minute.

"You, May," he roared, nasty, "I believe you do not love this way; get down to your cabin."

But see what the King's evidence said about me. One Creagh, a dirty wretch, and now a prisoner right in this goal for treason with Captain Vaughan, and one time aboard the *Charles the Second*, witnessed that at this going-off of the ship, "I met with William May, the prisoner at the bar. 'What do you do here?' says he. I made him no answer but went down to my cabin, and May swore at me and said, 'You deserve to be shot through the head,' and he held a pistol at my head."

Can you imagine a man who has fought for his King and country being a party to the crime of stealing the ship of a fellow-subject? Not only that. The ship's carpenter was a ringleader with Mr. Every in this insurrection, and Creagh—may he be eaten alive with weevils—swore the carpenter said in his hearing—

"Old May I can trust with anything; he is a true cock of the old game and an old sportsman."

Was ever such a farrago told in a King's court?

Me, an old bird at the pirate game—me, an old sportsman—me, who would not demean myself to wipe my boots on that carpenter's neck! Sam Parsons, who is now in Virginia, was standing by when Every drove me to my cabin, and he would swear to my truth.

But does the King call him? Nay. But such treasonable scandalizers as Creagh—they get the run of the deck. Would the King, begging his Majesty's pardon, bring a witness from Virginia to save a poor sailor's life? Ask him!

I could not stay down in the cabin for thinking of my old commander and what might be happening to him. I almost cried for my old commander. At the risk of my head I went to his cabin. Two men stood guard at the door with naked cutlases; I begged leave to go in, and at length they allowed me.

Oh, my poor old commander! He was red with fever, and the chirurgeon was anointing his temples. He got out of bed and began to dress himself, with me there to lend him a steadying hand.

"Ah, faithful May—" he was saying when in came Mr. Every, smelling of grog, and with a most impudent look.

"I am a man of fortune, captain," he said, making a bow, "and my fortune I must seek."

"I am sorry this happens at this time," said my poor old commander.

"Come with us, captain, and you shall still have the command," replied Mr. Every.

Says Captain Gibson:

"No. I never thought you would have served me so, who have been kind to all of you; and to go on a design against my owner's orders I will not do it."

"Then," said Mr. Every, "prepare to go ashore."

What honest sailorman would not be plowed in his feelings by his old commander's plight? Should I have been ashamed though my tears dropped upon the captain's trembling hand? He looked kindly upon me as I stood there still in my shirt and stockings.

"Go, faithful May," he said at last. "Nothing will avail now."

III

I WENT back to the deck to get my bearings. From one and another, so far as the tumult which was on the ship permitted, I made out that the taking of the *Charles the Second* was in this wise:

Mr. Every, using the common grief about the wages to serve his turn, made fellow-plotters of some score of men, both in the *Charles the Second* and the *James*. The night having been picked out on the calendar, it was agreed that at a given time by the clock one from the *Charles the Second* should go to the *James* and say that the *Charles the Second* was being run off. The officers of the *James*, it was expected, would order out the pinnace in pursuit, when the friends of Mr. Every were to crowd forward, fill the boat, and make for the *Charles the Second*, where instead of arresting her they would turn to and haul together with their companion miscreants of the *Charles the Second*, who in the mean time would have seized the ordnance and ammunitions aboard our ship. The cables of the *Charles the Second* were to be cut, all but two of her boats turned adrift, and her sails shaken out loose.

Things went smoothly according to plan. At nine o'clock one went from the *Charles the Second* to the *James*. At the head of the gangway of that ship he found Mr. Druit, mate, on watch. Says he to Mr. Druit—

"Have you seen the drunken boatswain of ours aboard your ship?"

"No," says Mr. Druit. "Isn't he aboard of you?"

"Nay," said the villain conspirator; "he's not aboard, but mischief is."

He leaned close to the mate and whispered—

"They're running off with the *Charles the Second*."

At once Mr. Druit bellowed for the pinnace to be got out, which, of course, merely gave the ruffians their cue. Twenty-six men, laden with their hammocks and sea-gear, immediately rushed forth and manned the pinnace.

"Here—here—" cries Mr. Druit, seeing a wicked game going; but the rascals had their oars in the water and made off in the dark, swearing and sinking.

Thereupon Captain Humphries, of the *James*, rushed to the rail and shouted through his speaking-trumpet that his boat was being stolen, to which Mr. Every, likewise through a trumpet, impertinently answered he knew that well enough. So they came to our ship and knotted themselves together with our rascals.

No sooner had the runaways from the *James* thrown their hammocks to our deck than light sail was set, and we stood out of the harbor, this being the motion which had first brought me a-running from my cabin. At eleven o'clock the topsail was braced back, and we lay to. Mr. Every, who now called himself captain, sent word about the ship that certain ones were free to leave in the pinnace of the *James* if so they chose. Men of spirit, he said, would stay by the ship and collect their back pay. And he laughed.

IV

RIGHT here is the kernel of the case. Did Mr. Every pick the men who should go ashore if they wanted, or was that liberty given to any one? If Mr. Every picked out the people to go, then we who stayed were kept against our wills, and are innocent; if we could have gone and did not, then we are guilty.

We had been acquitted on our first trial for piracy of the ship *Gunsway*, and I am talking now about our second trial, of which the theft of the *Charles the Second* was made the charge. Hence the King must prove that we were parties to this latter crime. All the King's evidence swore that any man might go who would—except the doctor; all of us prisoners at the bar stuck to it that none could leave but by Mr. Every's say-so.

And whom did the King call?

Creagh. This fellow was one who left the ship when the boat went away for shore. Was he therefore a good, an

upright, an honorable man? If he had been, would he have associated himself afterward with Captain Vaughan and gone over to the King's enemies with Vaughan's ships, for which very crime he lies manacled with us? How truthful must he be!

Gravet. He too went from our ship; but he was so busy at his going, begging Mr. Every to let him take his sea-coffer and his clothes, that he had no means of marking much else that went on. How then did he find time to know so much about my deportment? Says he—

"When we had liberty to go out of the ship, this man May took me by the hand and wished me well home, and bid me remember him to his wife; and was very merry and jocund, and knew whither they were going."

Merry and jocund, and a knowing accomplice! What proof had he that I knew whither we were going? Who but Mr. Every and his ring knew that?

Creagh and Gravet, these two are all that went to the matter of my part in the plot, and Creagh may be discounted for a born liar, trying to serve his ends in his pending treason trial by convicting honest men, while Gravet—even if he told the fact concerning our parting—offered no proof beyond his thin statement that I "knew whither they were going." Yet when you get down to the bone I was convicted and handed to the hangman on those five words.

But, say some, how can you explain your being on a mutiny ship, stolen and making off for sea? I claim that Sam Parsons can bear me out touching Mr. Every and me, but Parsons is in Virginia; and there, for all the King cares, he may stay.

Alas!

My poor old commander, Captain Gibson, was lifted into the pinnace, where some seventeen or eighteen men were already gone, and who, when we had tossed them a bailing-bucket they cried for, shoved off for town.

Let me ask any man of fair mind this question: How could a hundred men, had they wanted, have gone off in a ship's pinnace?

When the boat had left we began the business of the ship and, hauling into the wind, made haste to leave those parts. I was deposed from quartermaster and a willing villain put at the whipstaff in my stead. More than half of us knew nothing but that we must be upon unlawful occasions.

The ship thieves were not fifty men, all tallied; yet with their control of our ordnance, fusees and small arms they could terrify the remaining hundred people into obedience to their horrid designs. Less than one in ten aboard could read and write, being for the more part ignorant seamen, easily deceived and commanded. Not only did Mr. Every and his wicked fellows steal a ship, but they kidnaped a crew.

V

WHEN we sailed from the Groyne we had a deal of bread and a couple of hundred pair of woollen stockings; but, wanting beef and more bread, we stood for the Madeira Islands. The evil disposition of Mr. Every quickly showed its true kind, for we were sent aboard three English ships which lay at the islands and looted them under the pretense of giving receipts for the things we took, with promises of future payment. Mr. Every laughed a great deal at this.

So too he laughed at our operations on the coast of Guinea, whither we went from the Madeiras. We sailed into Guinea Gulf under English colors solely to entice the poor, trusting negroes of the country aboard, who, when they came supposing we were to trade with them, were despoiled of their golden trinkets and thrown, chained together, into our hold.

These captives we took from the mainland over to Prince's Island, in the gulf, and marketed them with Dutch settlers. When it came to bring them up on deck we found the dead and the living sometimes chained together. It was a very great horror.

Being now a proper pirate, Mr. Every at this Prince's Island fought two Dane ships. We fair surprized them; not a few of their men being alongshore. We ran to leeward of the larger one and, opening our ports, bit into him with twenty guns, the blow of our shot shaking two Danes out of the shrouds to their deck, like a couple of ripe plums from a tree. With good spirit the merchantmen made what shift they might with their half-dozen small pieces, but a musket-shot killing the captain of the one we first attacked, both ships gave in.

Our brave show and talk so affected some of these Danes that a score of them signed on with Mr. Every. Our one broadside so damaged the Danish brig that Mr. Every set her afire, and we stood by, watching the burning and cheering whenever a canister of shot blew up, Mr. Every standing on our poop, the red of the flames glaring on his face, nodding his head and laughing with himself.

The smaller vessel we took with us, Mr. Every expecting to make himself a great admiral at the head of a great pirate fleet, though for sure it smirches the noble dignity of that honored title to give it to a miscreant so black.

Many folk—not a few of them of the highest fashion—have come to Newgate Gaol to see the notorious Captain Every's men, as if forsooth our feet were cleft like a goat's or horns were hid beneath our forelocks. Some of these have said it was not ingenuous for us who served by compulsion thus to engage in these villainous combats and sinful traffickings with slaves. "Why," say they, "did you not flee from Mr. Every at the first chance and return to England to make discovery of his crimes?"

There was no first, middle or last chance.

And what a ship it was! In place of discipline there was a disorder very afflicting to an old King's man. Each man counted himself the equal of the other, and although Mr. Every was a hard man and quick to strike, he was submitted to only because he was a navigator, and none could take the ship so well as he.

But he could make no general move without having first a consult in which all hands took part until the confabulation sounded like a tree full of crows. We called a vote on everything—the next place for depredation, the punishment of offenses aboard ship and the amount of plunder each man should get.

This last was a bone for the dogs to growl and bite about, I can tell you. Newcomers like the Danes were for having as much from the bag as the men who had stolen the ship at the Groyne.

"Nay," said these; "not so, for we brought you the ship, and you give us nothing but your hands."

"Good," quoth the recruits. "Then we can take ourselves off and you may have your ship and be hanged."

Thus the tree forked and on its opposite branches bore fruit of bitter will.

The small Danish sloop we were taking with us from Prince's Island made early harvest of the animosity among us. Mr. Every would keep her as a tender; others were for selling her so that they might paw some money.

"If you sell her," said certain ones, "what will be the shares of each?"

Thereupon the quarrel flared up, and nothing could be agreed except that Mr. Every should have two shares; that is, if the highest share were one thousand pounds Mr. Every should get two thousand pounds, but as to the rest there was no concord; the argument being as sharp as if the money for the sloop were already in the quartermaster's coffer. The Frenchmen recruited at the Madeiras were for the arbitrament of the dirk, seeing which—and that it was time to act—Mr. Every ordered the twenty-pounder shotted and trained on the sloop. He cut the tow-line and said, "Give it her betwixt the wind and the water," and thereupon old José, the Spanish gunner, hit her so neatly beneath her lowest ports that she was not atop the waves more than fifteen minutes.

"Rather she sink than we," said Mr. Every to the men, who now began to see that if they could not agree better the whole enterprise would be ruined.

VI

WE TURNED Cape Lopez, and, stopping for water at Annibo,* ran onward to the Cape of Good Hope, where we took a small coasting-sloop, rifled her and let her go. Thence we came to Madagascar, where we made some stay. I had been here many times before in honest ships, and it was with shame that I now came in with this unlawful company.

Not that there was anybody there whose rebuke I feared, for Madagascar was the wickedest place—outside the West Indies—in the ocean; but I was not easy for thinking that I was now one among those whom I had regarded in times past as malefactors. Three years had passed since my last visit, and piracy had swelled so much as to become a very great evil.

I saw, too, so many more pirating fellows from the West Indies—for the more part

*Anamaboe.

Englishmen hailing first from the American provinces, but so outlandish-looking a tribe one would never have known them for our countrymen except by their speech, they affecting a Spanish style—bright silk sashes, silk shirts, ruffled breeches; many wearing earrings, and not a few with heavy gold chains about their necks—the true fashion of Caribbean sea-robbers. Verily this place had become the very metropolis of rascality, the base for criminal cruises all the way to the Gulf of Aden and the coast of India.

Mr. Every could not come the Madeira game here but had to pay for the provisions he bought and the cows he purchased to slaughter and salt up, for none trafficked here save with a naked blade in one hand and the price in the other.

At Madagascar I took the sickness which even now afflicts me and has reduced me to the poorest state of body and mind ever a man fell into. I was too old for junketing about with pirates, being past sixty years of age, for the long deprivations and exposures of my life at sea—the inclement weather and the intolerable food I had had to endure—made me fit rather for a cottage in my native Mendip Hills, in the parish of Cheddar, rather than in so tan-chasing a fly-by-night company as cruel circumstance had put me.

The ship's doctor found at Madagascar the chance to quit our way of life and fled the ship, leaving me and a number of other sick men to suffer in our cabins, helpless on the hands of people who were more drunken than kind-hearted. How often have I lain on my bed and watched the cook, unstable with rum, tacking and yawing at my threshold, likely on an instant to founder and cast the kid of hot meat upon my head!

Just before we left this wicked and riotous island, one of the Caribbee pirates—an Englishman first from Boston in New England—brought to me the doctor of his ship; a sharp rascal who was sought in his own country for many crimes. This fellow bled me in two ways—one for my good with his lance, the other for his good with his pilfering fingers, for in mauling about my body he slyly stole thirty gold guineas from my belt. He said I ailed with the putrid fever and the dry belly-ache. He found me with two diseases; he left me with a third—a burning rancor against the villain which can never be eased save by bleeding; and I have long carried the leech which can suck deep of his venal blood.

Mr. Every now made sail for Joanna.*

"Here," thought I when we anchored, "is a quiet place for old Bill May to die, happy that his last breath should not be drawn on a ship stolen from his king and country."

With some other sick ones I was put ashore on the beach at Joanna, where they laid us out in a row under the trees, Mr. Every deputing a few men to attend upon us. I was now quite helpless, remaining useless of hands and feet and despairing of my life. In some peace we stayed there all that night, but before noon of the next day three large ships hove in sight—East Indiamen—and Mr. Every, in the greatest fright of being surprized at the roadstead with half his crew ashore, ordered all hands on board and to bring the water-kegs and the sick with them. They came with a great running and bustle to carry me away; but said I—

"Leave me here; I have no stomach to fight those three ships; I prefer to lie here and trust myself to my fellow-countrymen or to the mercy of the island negroes."

There being no time to confabulate, the men rushed for their boats without more ado, and soon the *Charles the Second* was hauled to the wind and off like a hare before the hounds.

The Indiamen came to anchor and made a great business of bringing kegs and barrels for water, boats plying between the shore and the ships. I purposed to apply to them for a passage from this lonely beach and a refuge from the wicked Mr. Every, and so made me a crutch, as it were, from the bough of a tree and with it very painfully I crawled to where the work was going forward.

A fat man with a red face and very white hair was commanding, whose name, a sailor told me, was Captain Edgcomb. To him I applied to be taken aboard his ship, but he—on my confessing I was from the *Charles the Second*—gave me scurrilous language, abusing me before all the people, and vehemently swearing that he would give me passage to Bombay—and there to the hangman. Thus the naughtiness on our ship had become the talk of all the world.

*In the Comoro Islands, Mozambique Channel, off the Madagascar coast.

"Aye," said I, "Captain Edgcomb, sir, rather would I go down with you to Bombay and die according to the law of my country than perish here at the hands of these heathen blackamoors, or among evil pirates."

He turned away to his work, rumbling in his throat like the end of a thunderstorm.

But others had compassion on me. As they came and went with their water-casks some humane men brought me one thing and another to refresh me, encouraging me also with the promise that I should go away with them. At evening the last load was taken. In that boat were the doctor and the purser, both of whom said the captain would send for me to come aboard.

"I am quite ready at any time," I told them, "for all I have in the world is the clothing that hangs to my back."

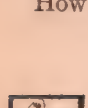
So very hopefully I sat me down upon the sand and watched the sun go to his rest beyond the far sea-line; but more I gazed at the masts and yards of the three ships which stood out so bold and black against the red sky; "they will come soon," thought I, "for they are getting ready to go," the men being in the shrouds and out on the foot-ropes.

When it grew dark lights jumped from porthole to porthole as the men went about the decks setting out the lanterns. I should guess the time to have been past midnight when the anchor-chains rattled and the capstan creaked and the chant of the people working it and the clatter of their bars in the drumhead sockets came across the water—"they will be here anon," thinks I, and I got down as close to the water as I could that they should lose no effort when the boat came in for me.

But it did not come. Perhaps it was one o'clock when the ships' lights began to move away—away and away until they went out altogether, and only a long, thin lane of moonlight relieved the wide, empty waste. My feet felt wet—I looked down and found I was standing in water up to my knees.

How hard is the sea!

VII



I CRAWLED up the sand and lay stupidly all night, nor thought—nay hardly wished—to see another morning dawn. The blackamoors that rampaged in this island would surely finish me if disease did not, though indeed some had been along the beach when we came in and did us no harm.

Toward noon as I sat under a tree feeling indeed that I was sinking to my end, there came one of the negroes to me. He was a very tall man with a sort of twisted face, the jib of his chin being thrust somewhat to the side rather than in front—which did not make him look pretty. But he wore breeches and a torn shirt, while in his belt was stuck a sailor's dirk, which was a great wonderment to me. If he were a vulture he should find but bony carrion.

"Hello, Jack!"

I opened my eyes, sure now that the fever had got to my brain.

"Who be you?" I asked, not believing that my ears heard English from a native negro.

He leaned back with his hands on his hips and laughed at my astonishment.

"You know Bednal Green, Jack?"*

Bednal Green? Aye, Green's the name and green's the word. Green! Oh, for the leaves, the grass, the young buds of Spring; just one handful of those was worth more than all of these yellow sands, glaring waters and banana skies! Bednal Green! The very word—the name—was like cold water on a gritted tongue! Bednal Green! Aye, had I the choice between the eating-room of the "White Duck" Tavern and the palace of the Grand Mogul across the water in India there would be no bargaining. Did I know Bednal Green!

"Aye," said I, "very well."

"You have ale at him White Duck?"

Ale at the White Duck—the very place that was running in my mind! I knew then that I was dreaming; that I was out of my head and that I would surely soon die. Verily I had drunk ale in the White Duck; drunk it often of Winter mornings when Mistress Brown, in a clean apron, kept the coal-fire bright in the grate, and the carters from the country, leaving their wains outside, came stamping in, blowing upon their finger-tips and shouting the gossip of the frozen roads. I lost myself in a sort of swoon.

When I came back to my senses I was lying in the old hut of a fisherman, and the big black fellow was fanning my head with a bundle of broad leaves. He must have

*Bethnal Green, now in the limits of London.

carried me in from the beach; an easy job, for I was all skin and bones, and he was a giant.

When he saw me open my eyes he bade me fear nothing, that I was in his house and the people of the place would do me no hurt. He said that I might call him Jim.

Jim nursed me like I was a baby; he gave me food and drink; he tried to keep me cool at noon and warm at night, and all without pay, for not one penny piece of my few remaining coins would he take. His was just a heart of good-will. And in between whiles he told me the strange story of his life.

He had gone to England from Africa on a British ship a long time before and had made his dwelling in London, particularly in this suburb of Bednal Green, where he turned his hand to one thing and another wherever there was need of a man of strength. At length, being of the mind to go to sea again, he had left England in the ship *Rochester*—I knew her very well—bound for the Indies.

But off Guinea they fell into a sea-fight with a Frenchman, and were very hardly pressed, their enemy having more guns and men than they. Resolving to make a struggle to the finish, the captain of the *Rochester*—probably to keep his men from fleeing—ordered Jim to cut the long-boat adrift from the stern of the ship. Jim went beyond his orders, for after cutting the rope he stayed in the boat and made off with it under cover of the gun-smoke.

He had not got a mile away when with a great noise the *Rochester* blew up, her powder having exploded by accident. He made his way to Guinea and from there, on one ship and another, he had slowly worked his way to this place of Joanna, where he had a mind to settle himself among the native people.

"Why," said I, "are you so kind to me?"

To this he replied that he had a kindness for plain sailormen; that they suffered much on their ships at the hands of hard masters, and many had, out of their little, often supplied his wants.

For eight weeks black Jim thus cared for me—a poor, forlorn, marooned seaman, and a sailor's blessing rests upon him. I owe him my life.

At the end of that time he came one day into the hut and said that a ship was standing in. He had brought my strength up so that I could now walk a little, and I went out into the sunshine and there, sure enough, was a ship—and it was the ship of Mr. Every. He had evidently come again for water.

Here then was a puzzle for me. Should I go back to him or stay with the good Jim and his people? I am an Englishman and not an African—I would be home again. Jim could not come down to the beach for fear of being taken as a slave, but he and the natives fled back into the island. I bade him good-by with all my heart—the only friend I was to find in thousands of watery miles.

Mr. Every was down at the boats.

"Hallo, old May," he said. "We thought you must be dead by now; that the sickness had taken you. You must have been born to be hanged!"

VIII

GETTING out to sea strengthened me a little more, and I took heart, though the evil associations of the *Charles the Second* pained the conscience. Very small scrapings had fallen to them since they had left Joanna, and the mood of the crew was sour.

However, they parliamented together and voted to go to the Gulf of Aden to find Moorish ships, and perhaps waylay the rich fleet of Mocha, whose movements they had learned of at Madagascar.

"With that," said Mr. Every, "we shall make our fortune"—fortune being a great word in his mouth.

In those regions the sun is cruel. As we drew on to the gulf the heat lay upon us like a smothering blanket; nay, like many blankets, so that the very air one breathed seemed to sear the throat; we went about our blistered decks nearly naked—to put your hand on one of the guns was like laying it on a hot oven—and Mr. Every sprawled under an awning that was rigged over the poop, drinking bomboo* and wishing he had made his fortune and were living in a fine house with a fine wife in England. Nor had we the comfort of looking toward cooler waters, but every day drew farther and farther into the furnace.

At the mouth of the Red Sea—red is the color of flame—we fell in with two ships that were on the same account as we, and

*Grog of limes, sugar, etc.

the morning after meeting them met three more ships of bad intent, some being Englishmen from America—Captains May (no relative of mine) Farrel and Wake—until you might have supposed a parliament of pirates was meeting. We were all there for the Mocha fleet; but after riding together a night or two and exchanging visits we separated, each captain having his own notion of the place where the fleet we sought would pass.

But wide is the sea and many are its paths—and the Mocha fleet slipped by us all in the night of Saturday. Next morning the men held a general consult as to whether we should follow them or not, and after a great dispute as usual a vote was taken which fell for pursuit, and so the Sabbath was desecrated by a wicked chase.

At sundown we came upon a lagging ship of the fleet and took her without a fight, and with her something of gold and silver, but no great sum. We put a prize crew aboard but soon called them off again and left the ship to go her voyage.

There was enough profit in this plunder to cheer our people, and they became hungry for more. A few days thereafter we spied another sail and, getting up our anchor, stood to her. Before we came up to her a haze fell over the sea, which presently turned to a thick fog, thereby favoring Mr. Every's enterprise by allowing him to get close and make a sort of surprize.

When nigh enough we sent a shot across her bows; but she, fearing that we were a lawless ship, refused to heave back but hauled to the wind and made off. With the breeze on our starboard quarter, despite the fog we kept her in sight; and, being the better sailer, we drew down upon her, so near that we made her out to be the *Gunsway*, East Indiaman.

Mr. Every now yawed his ship occasionally as he worked for the range; but they opened first at us, giving us a load from their stern-chasers, which split our larboard fore-yardarm and might, had it been a little cleaner break, have put us out of the pursuit. Mr. Every replied with our bow-chasers, which we learned afterward did them little hurt.

Our captain, wishing to get the range for his broadside more quickly and the *Gunsway* beginning to show a chance of escape, we put our helm down hard, and, coming athwart the bow, fell foul of the *Gunsway*, so that our larboard cathead was abreast her starboard gangway. Here we fought muzzle to muzzle—they with brass cannon, we with our iron ones—as pretty a fight as ever I saw since the days of the old *Hector* and the battle of Bergen.

If we had had to fight it out in this fashion the event might have been uncertain, but Mr. Every—who as I have said was a fine seaman—cunningly disengaged his ship and managed to back her clear of the *Gunsway* and then, bearing up under her stern, let go a broadside.

That finished a fight which could not have been longer than an hour. The Indiaman put out the white flag; nor could he do less, seeing his hull and rigging were badly hit and ten of his men lay dead about his guns. Half a dozen of the pirates were killed and not a few wounded.

During the battle I hauled ammunition and dragged off the wounded to the hold—to shirk here would have been to buy a quick end to my life.

Over the bulwarks of the *Gunsway* our villains poured and ran greedily about the ship looking for loot. Presently a great shout went up, and four men ran from the master's cabin bearing brass-bound coffers—the ship's treasure.

Somebody with an ax smashed the fastenings, and over the decks there spilled great piles of gold and silver coins—of pieces-of-eight, for instance, we afterwards counted not less than one hundred thousand. Add to this the same number of chequins* and you can see that Mr. Every had made his fortune.

The pirates went mad with delight; some danced upon the money, some threw themselves on the deck and tossed and fingered the coins like children playing on the sand; while as for Mr. Every he stood leaning upon his cutlas, looking down at the shining heaps and laughing.

Nothing would do the men but to divide the spoil then and there, and the average share was worth one thousand pounds apiece. Five hundred pounds were given me, though I had been sick, useless and more of a hindrance than help.

Though this was the wrong sort of salt-water money, I perforce took it, being in no mind to have myself marked among them. When they had stripped the *Gunsway* of everything that could be carried off

*Sequins—worth about $2.25.

they left her to go on to Surat with her sad tale of crime.

IX

WITH so notable a felony on their souls, all felt that the time had come to leave those regions entirely. We set off for the Indian coast, from which it was designed to go to the West Indies. A large body of men, however, resolved to leave the ship at India; and twenty-five Frenchmen, fourteen Danes and a company of Englishmen were there set ashore at their desire. For they were afraid if they came to England and were caught, they should be hanged, and they thought themselves more secure among the pagans.

Mr. Every set off for the West Indies with a light complement, and attempted no piracy during all that long and wearisome way. We watered at one or two places, including Ascension, but made no long stop until we anchored at New Providence.

As we came to this port we were at a loss to know the kind of welcome that might wait us; so when we anchored we held a consult, and one who was a clerk drafted a letter to the Governor of this Providence Island, setting out that we desired to come into the town, find anchorage and have the liberties of the place, for which the men would present the governor with twenty pieces-of-eight and two pieces of gold, all told, and Mr. Every, because he had a double share, offered for himself forty pieces-of-eight and four gold coins.

One Adams was our ambassador, who with a few of our men to form a sort of honor guard went ashore, while we lay by waiting the result. Our messengers soon came back with a letter from the governor, saying that we were welcome and could come and go again when we pleased. Thus for sixty pieces of silver and six pieces of gold we bought the keys of the town.

Here the adventure so wickedly begun at the Groyne ended. Most of our people scattered themselves about these West Indies, where they found great hospitality for pirates, particularly at this New Providence, which rivaled Madagascar for folk of this complexion.

Mr. Every made a great friend of the island governor and gave all the promise in the world of becoming one of the leading malefactors of this region. Here he found the things he liked, for from these parts real navies of buccaneers set out to harry the Main itself, the American provinces—everywhere, even, as I had seen, over to the far shores of Africa and India.

As for me, with the money I had from the *Gunsway* I bought passage on a ship going to the Virginia plantations.

"Farewell, wicked ship and wicked men," thought I as the Virginia vessel passed by the *Charles the Second* at her moorings; "farewell," said I, gazing at the empty decks on which the sun lay white and hot; "good riddance, and may you be quickly entombed in the deep waters."

Had I been a moral philosopher and not a mere sailorman I would have profited by my reflections.

Would that I had tarried in Virginia, where there is much to a man's liking! But no, I longed to be at home and out of the sun; I longed for the cool vales of Somerset and the sweet evening air which from the Mendips blows the blue peat-smoke about the thatched roofs of simple cottages; I longed for quietness and rest, and these honest longings drove me afoul of the cruel courts of justice.

I was still miserably weak when I crawled at length from the docks at Bristol up into the town. I lay a week in bed at a tavern in the High Street, afflicted with a return of the dry belly-ache.

I felt danger to be about me; for all England over there was little talk but of the notorious Captain Every; no exaggeration of his crimes being too great or untrue to go down the gullets of the staring people. Behind it all was the East India Company, as well as the Mogul rulers, who dinned continually at the British Government for the punishment and extermination of pirates.

All of this was to make bad weather for me, yet I was resolved to go to my lords of the Admiralty and make a plain discovery of all the things which had taken place. Scarcely able to pull my breeches over my shrunken knees, I nevertheless paid my score and set out by coach for London.

The coach had not gone three leagues from town before she was hove to, and, behold you, the King's messengers were there, looking for old Bill May.

"You are one of Every's men," they said, hauling me out the gangway. "We have a warrant to take you."

"You only anticipate me," said I, "for I was on my way to London to discover all."

They bore me off to Bath in a carriage of their own, and there before his Grace the Duke of Devonshire I was examined touching my part in Mr. Every's enterprise. I made a clear account of all that I have here set down; but despite that I was remitted to Newgate Gaol to be tried as a felon.

In this close I found when I came in my old shipmates Joseph Dawson, Edward Forseith, William Bishop, James Lewis and John Sparkes, with young Middleton and one Dan, who had crept home by one ship and another only to be snatched up as I was. One person and another, recognizing us for Every's men, had betrayed us.

We went first to trial on an indictment of piracy of the *Gunsway*. We were confronted by a bench of more than half a dozen judges; we were harried by a shoal of prosecutors; we were lied about by one witness and another, yet in spite of all—in spite of all that Dan and Middleton, a saucy lad aboard our ship, who were King's evidence, could say; in spite of the thunderings and belching and blasts of the lawyers, the jury—true men and good—returned us not guilty.

That put the King's counsel to be the laughing-stock of the country, so to save their faces they put us to another trial, this time for the stealing of the *Charles the Second* at the Groyne. For witnesses they brought again young Middleton as well as Mr. Gravet, the old second mate, and the liar Creagh. Not only did these tell of the matter at the Groyne, but Middleton and one or two others went all over the Indies and up to New Providence again—which was a sly way of trying us twice for one offense.

How the judges and lawyers admonished the jury!

"If you have the true English spirit, if you believe in the Christian religion—" I had almost said, "If you love your mother"—"you must convict these rascals at the bar."

How they belabored the jury which had acquitted us on the first trial—you would have thought they were nothing other than Frenchmen in disguise, and the veriest traitors, heretics and homicides. Aye, they did for us—guilty.

Last night the clerk of St. Sepulcher's* as the custom is came under our windows with his bell and cried to those who might have to die on the morrow to repent their sins. The doleful sound threw me into a horror—I fear that my name will be in the morning's death-warrant.

Author's Note

Mr. May's premonition was fulfilled; on Wednesday, November 26, 1696, at Execution Dock—which overlooks the Thames at Blackwall and was the usual place of punishment of sea criminals—he and his fellow defendants were hanged. Reading his quaint story, which in substance was his evidence at the trial, we get the idea that if he and his fellow-accused were to be convicted at all it should have been for the matter of the *Gunsway* and not the theft of the *Charles the Second*.

Mr. May is borne out by the record when he says he was convicted of the latter offense by the five words of Mate Gravet; to wit, that May knew of the plot. But there was no proof or showing how Mr. Gravet knew that May knew, unless Creagh's testimony tends to uphold it.

But Creagh was utterly unreliable. He had left the *Charles the Second* at the Groyne, and going to sea again with one Captain Vaughan, he took part with the latter in treasonably turning over the King's ship to the King's enemies, for which he was lying in Newgate when May was brought in. He had every interest to serve by lending help to the prosecution. On his trial for treason, which was then pending, his own brother was forced to take the stand and brand him a liar and a rogue. He might have been telling the truth about May but certainly not beyond a doubt.

Of course, May—like old dog Tray—was in bad company, and his explanation of his remaining on the *Charles the Second* after the mutiny does not seem convincing; but it can be said that he was not fairly convicted according to the standard of a later and more enlightened code, and therefore, technically at least, must be regarded as innocent.

*The church that stood across from Newgate.

Mohamed Ali and the Father of Donkeys

by George E. Holt

Author of "Mohamed Ali and the Basha of Tangier," "Ransom," etc.

NOW IT came about that Mohamed Ali, the bandit, after having tricked the Basha of Tangier and brought quick death to Kaid Bargash of Ain Dalia through another maneuver, was yet hunted day and night by soldiers of the sultan. But Morocco, which was designed by Allah for the pleasure and safety of the Faithful—although Europe has now made it slightly obsolete in that respect—offers innumerable retreats for a fugitive.

Although Mohamed Ali was now officially an outlaw he was nevertheless not a low character or one without recognized power. Being a direct descendent of the Prophet, Mohamed Ali was a *shareef*, which is a prince of Islam; and although the sultan, who of course was the greatest *shareef* of them all, might cut off his head and hang it grinning over the Fez gate, the passer-by would look upon it with reverence—and until then would earnestly seek his blessing.

As has been related, immediately before becoming an outlaw Mohamed Ali had been Basha of Tangier. But when Sid Omar ibn Malek had been appointed to supersede him, Mohamed Ali, in his endeavor at first to retain his office and afterward to lend aid to his friend the vizier, had got himself into difficulties which had caused him to seek refuge in the fastness of the Anghera hills.

From this vantage point Mohamed Ali had attempted to recoup his power—as he had done on at least one previous occasion—by seizing the person of an Englishman and holding him hostage for his own safety and return to power. The English, he knew, would say to the sultan—

"Mr. Valley alive or Mr. Mohamed Ali dead, or we will shoot up one of your towns and collect a whale of an indemnity."

And the sultan would reply to the English—

"But I can not catch Mohamed Ali and rescue Mr. Valley."

Thereupon the English would say:

"But Mohamed Ali wants certain things in exchange for Mr. Valley. Give them."

And the sultan would cry—

"But Mohamed Ali wants everything but the sacred white umbrella."

And the English would make answer:

"That concerns us not. Give him the white umbrella even, if he ask for it. But to us give Mr. Valley immediately, quickly and at once."

Whereupon the sultan would have to do as on a previous occasion—grant all of Mohamed Ali's demands in exchange for some person whom, had it not been for England or some other country, Mohamed Ali might have drawn and quartered or

"Mohamed Ali and the Father of Donkeys," copyright, 1923, by George E. Holt.

baked in a bread-oven so far as he was concerned. Mohamed Ali knew quite a number of things he desired.

But Allah's smile was not vouchsafed to his understanding. The attempt to kidnap the Englishman failed by a hair's breadth. But it caused the British Government, through the head of its diplomatic mission to Morocco—Sir Mortimer Jones—to demand of the sultan punishment for Mohamed Ali so that the use of English subjects in native political affairs should be discouraged. So the sultan ordered the Basha of Tangier to capture Mohamed Ali, and the basha offered a substantial reward.

This reward was collected by Mohamed Ali himself, and the episode had made it inadvisable for him longer to remain concealed in the house of Mustapha, the farmer, at the very doorstep of Tangier; to play with the girl child of Mustapha, and to count the prickly pears upon the cactus hedge surrounding the garden. Wherefore he had gone into the almost inaccessible foot-hills of the Atlas to visit his family, and thence with a few score followers to go forth to see what he could see.

In the mean time the anxiety of the sultan to capture Mohamed Ali had been constantly increasing, with the result that his Majesty had many bodies of troops running hither and thither in search of him. And thus it came about that Mohamed Ali, at twilight of a certain day, looked down from a little village on a hilltop and saw a large body of *m'halla*—government troops. An hour later their circular white tents had sprung up like mushrooms and formed an unbroken chain about the hill. Mohamed Ali was surrounded.

Now although for the moment this situation caused him to wrinkle his brow in surprize, it can not be said that he was worried. He was in a trap, true—but the trap had not yet been sprung. And Mohamed Ali, on more than one occasion having commanded just such *m'halla* as this, knew that nothing would be done today which could be put off till tomorrow.

Sunrise would see the troops tightening the circle about the hill as they ascended toward the village whose thatched roofs were almost invisible among the high cactus hedges. At sunrise—with the help of Allah, the Omnipotent—he, Mohamed Ali, would be elsewhere.

He squatted cross-legged upon his prayer-rug and attacked the problem of getting through the line of white tents. After a little while he began to laugh, and long and loud his guffaws echoed down the hill. Then he arose, folded his prayer-rug twice placed it under his arm and went to the village, where he summoned the headman.

Their conversation seemed irrelevant to the matter of the white tents. They talked of nothing but donkeys. The village was well supplied with these little beasts of burden, a census showing some threescore.

At this count Mohamed Ali was much pleased.

"With an army of sixty donkeys *and* the help of Allah the Almighty," said he, "I can do much. Having commanded *m'halla*, assuredly I can command donkeys; there is little difference."

And again he laughed, while the headman looked at him with a perplexed wrinkle above his nose. Then followed instructions.

As soon as it grew dark the headman and other men of the village tethered the donkeys in certain appointed places. When that was done, said Mohamed Ali—

"Now tie about the neck of each donkey a rope twice the length of a man, and to the other end of each rope tie a big leaf of spiny cactus."

This too was done. The night advanced. Lights died in the tents of the *m'halla;* the army slept. Then again Mohamed Ali gave an order:

"To the tail of each donkey tie another cactus leaf. But so do it that it will not prick the *burrico* while he stands still."

Followed the sound of cactus leaves being torn from the big plants, and words addressed to restless donkeys. When all had been done, Mohamed Ali mounted his horse.

"Beat now the donkeys until they begin to run," he commanded, and rode slowly down the hill toward the ghostly ring of tents.

Immediately there came the sound of blows, and the snorts and brays of sixty surprized donkeys. Then as the long, sharp spikes of the cactus bit into their legs and rumps, there came a crash as if the village were moving down-hill. Part of it was. Threescore frightened and smarting *burricos* were dashing along threescore separate routes toward the white tents of the *m'halla*, as if the devil himself prodded them on.

And with them rode Mohamed Ali, commander-in-chief, as he told himself mockingly, of the donkey regiment.

A sentry fired a shot at an approaching black mass and then threw his gun away and ran shouting. The camp of the *m'halla* awoke with a start, to find the tents falling about its ears. One can not turn sixty maddened donkeys loose in a camp, with ropes dragging to catch every tentguy, without causing a noticeable disturbance. To say nothing of the big cactus leaf trailing from the end of each rope.

Bedlam broke loose. Those soldiers of the sultan who escaped enmeshing in the falling tents and sought safety, knowing that a greatly superior force had fallen upon them, became like pin-cushions for the sharp barbs of the heavy, bouncing cactus leaves.

Within five minutes from the time of the sentinel's shot, the *m'halla*, from the colonel in command down to the lowest of the camp-cooks, was either streaking it to some imaginary safety through the darkness, or was inextricably wrapped in a tent and keeping very still. The colonel was rolled up in a particularly large and beautiful tent with blue *fleur-de-lis* on it.

Through this roaring nightmare in darkness rode a figure on horseback—rode through and on into comparative quiet. Then he reined in his horse and listened. One sound separated itself from the medley of noise and cut through the night like a simetar—the victorious braying of a donkey. Mohamed Ali laughed long and loud; but more long and loud would he have laughed if he had known that this long-eared chanticleer stood straddle of a big bundle of a tent marked by blue *fleur-de-lis*, in which a colonel lay, very silent.

"Allah is great!" observed Mohamed to his horse, and rode on.

The next day a crestfallen colonel reported to his Majesty that he had been set upon and defeated by a vastly superior force. But the truth of the matter had reached the ears of the sultan before the perspiring officer had gained the Presence. And the colonel was not pleased when the sultan bestowed upon him—in rather dangerous jesting—the title of Bo-Hamara, or Father of Donkeys. Mohamed Ali's jest had been enough.

LA RIATA

by Harold Willard Gleason

I'VE heard a-many fellows sing
Of gals and all that sort of thing,
But I've a pal that I can swing,
More graceful than them all;
She's been my steady many a year,
At round-ups gay an' brandin's drear;
She's taller than most gals, I hear—
Or they're uncommon tall!

An' as to "lines" an' "curves"—oh, say!
She's got 'em all beat thataway!
She's lithe an' graceful as the day,
An' mighty far from fat;
She's saved my life, by strength an' speed
An' standin' strain in hours of need
A hundred times—some queen indeed!
For she's—my lariat!

CONCLUSION

Author of "Over the Rim of the Ridge," "Tameless Days," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

I HAD come from Fort Du Quesne in distant Ohio, where I had played the Frenchman, to my home town, Alexandria, in Virginia, bringing news to Governor Dinwiddie. For England and France were gambling again—the stakes, the land east of the Alleghanies and the friendship of that onlooker, the Red Man.

True, I was wanted at home for certain ancient debts; for my father, "Brond of the Open Hand," had left only debts for a legacy. Yet in the confusion incident to the impending campaign I passed unrecognized, save that near my old home I met Josephine, my boyhood sweetheart. With her was her fiancé, young Busby. He and I had played Indian-fighting in our boyhood, and he was now with Braddock's army, preparing for the campaign.

Althought my message was to Governor Dinwiddie, it was General Braddock who should profit by my news, for he was in command of the English regulars sent to aid the colonies against the French. But General Braddock profited by no man's advice. Not altogether at fault, for recruits and supplies were lacking, he yet failed to grasp the essentials of warfare in this strange land, and clung to the military science as taught by war in Europe.

My reception by General Braddock did not change my first impression of him. My dark skin—I was ever called "Black" Brond—and my knowledge of the red men have caused me to be taken for a half-Indian before now; and my forest-runner's dress did not win me favor in the general's eyes. When I presented a letter from George Croghan and made my report on the weakness of the French at Fort Du Quesne, it made little impression upon him. He bade me go out ahead of the army to secure enlistments among the provincials. Governor Morris secretly gave me a message to Croghan.

Outside the town I found the camp of my friend Round Paw, the Onondaga. My way was ever his, and we struck northward for the Pennsylvania border.

Next morning we came upon Balsar Cromit, a young frontiersman at McDowell's settlement—a man of marvelous strength and great simplicity of mind. By promising him a long rifle we induced him to join us.

Hearing that a clearing-out of witches was taking place at Great Cove, we hastened thither, and succeeded in putting to rout certain settlers who were baiting a young girl and her uncle.

The old man, overcome by shock, died that night; and the girl disappeared, first promising to go to McDowell's mill. But when we came there we could find no trace of her.

The promise of land induced one Simon Flax to join us, leaving his wife to guard their home and children.

Cromit, with his insatiable desire for proving his finger strength, provoked Flax to a "wring."

Their hands met, and fingers grasped fingers.

"Go," snapped Flax, jumping all his strength into his big hands.

In a moment Flax was on his knees crying with pain, and defeated.

I DELIVERED my message to Croghan at Will's Creek, where Braddock and his army soon arrived, but were forced to delay ten days awaiting the artillery. The presence of non-combatants and the illness of many regulars hampered the preparations.

My attempt to instruct a sergeant in woods-fighting antagonized him, and I was rescued from punishment as a French spy, by Major Washington, who vouched for me.

The major feared an ambuscade by the French, and persuaded General Braddock to send me again to Fort Du Quesne as a spy.

"*Long Rifles*," *copyright*, 1923, *by Hugh Pendexter.*

In the meantime I rescued a slim youth—as I thought—who was being put upon by a bully, only to learn that it was the girl of Witches' Head—Elsie Dinwold.

Round Paw and I were joined on the march by Balsar Cromit, whose long rifle had been stolen in camp. He was determined to catch the thief.

We found a dead Huron who had evidently been shot by the thief with the rifle and scalped by Black Jack the Indian-hater, who passed us on the march. The trail led us to a cabin surrounded by Hurons attacking under French command. The thief of the long rifle was within.

We made the cabin after some fighting and found Elsie Dinwold again. An attempt to get water brought the French captain upon us, and him I captured alive. The girl fled to the woods.

Beauvais, the Frenchman, I left in Cromit's charge while the Indian and I sought the girl. At nightfall we were accosted by Jacob Hardy—the man of peace—and under his protection we traveled amidst hostile Indians until early morning, when we escaped to a hiding-place.

Near Allaquippa's town a carrier of French belts was robbed by the Onondaga of his wampum and, as a Frenchman and his ally, we entered the town.

A Frenchman I had met before, Monsieur Falest, who was on a mission to win over the woman sachem, took me to her. With her was Elsie Dinwold.

Allaquippa refused the belts of the Frenchman and bade me begone when I had rested.

The girl sought French protection and was to go with Falest to Du Quesne.

The Onondaga brought me news that Beauvais had escaped from Cromit, and warned me to leave the village before he could arrive.

THREE Delawares intercepted my path, and, believing me to be French, prepared to torture me. I was tied to a tree with a cord around each wrist. From this predicament the Onondaga attempted to rescue me, but we would both have been killed had not Hardy appeared. His rebukes to the Delawares sent them cowering away.

While I lay in wait for Beauvais, who must not betray me at Du Quesne, I heard Elsie Dinwood and her escort pass.

In the early morning I heard two rifle shots. A moment later I intercepted Cromit on the trail. He had killed the Frenchman and tossed his body into the river. I left Cromit in Allaquippa's village to carry to the army any news the Onondaga might bring. As an Englishman he was well-received, while we hurried on our way.

I was welcomed at Du Quesne by Captain Beaujeu, to whom I gave news. He expected defeat but would make a good fight. He asked me for news of Falest, who should have arrived ahead of me. Beauvais, he said, had come with a young Englishman. So it was Falest who had been killed, while Beauvais might appear at any moment!

I might have escaped had I not stayed for Round Paw. Six of us sat down to dinner, an empty chair being reserved for Beauvais.

The Delawares, led by Pontiac, had returned from a bear-hunt, and honors were bestowed on the killers. A medicine-lodge was set up outside our window so that the spirits might prophesy.

Through the strains of the Indian songs I heard the Onondaga's message, "*Ha-hum-weh.*" Then Little Wolf showed us some conjuring tricks. He spoke mysteriously of hidden enemies. To turn the thoughts of the commandant I performed a trick with bark, which neither Pontiac nor Little Wolf could discover.

The dancing and the speaking of spirits went on, and suddenly Beauvais entered the room. Escape was impossible. As he denounced me, the Onondaga swept out the lights and leaving the Indian who had suspected us, murdered, he led me to a canoe where Elsie Dinwood awaited us.

Round Paw was to make for Allaquippa's town while the girl and I sought Braddock's army. The pursuit was so close that we took refuge in Frazier's cabin just in time. There was no water. Picking up the kettles, I bade her watch to unbar the door for me on my return.

I WAS through the door with the kettles and running toward the creek before she could offer more objections. I reached the water and dipped the kettles full before the savages opened fire. A red man does not know how to take care of a gun. Most of their arms were the faulty trade-muskets, and their aim was poor even under decent conditions. I started back, confident the heavy balls would miss me; but when they began showering down their arrows I was more concerned.

My dash to the creek had either taken them by surprize, or else they had withdrawn a bit to hold a powwow. I believe they had withdrawn with a few men standing guard; for the firing did not become general until I was half-way back. At that distance from the cabin I heard the girl's rifle go off.

Running gently so as not to spill any of the precious water, I was pronouncing my race won when a tall savage emerged from the woods on my left and approached at right angles. He fired an arrow while moving at full speed, and then dropped his bow to draw his ax. The girl appeared in the doorway with my long rifle and leaned the heavy barrel against the end of a log. As the whip-like crack rang out the Indian leaped high and came down in a heap.

Still controlling my stride I was within two rods of the door, where the girl stood leaning against the rifle, when a savage turned the corner of the cabin and darted between us. He had approached from the woods back of the cabin while the girl was in the doorway. I set down one kettle and pulled my ax. To my surprize the Indian whirled about and jumped toward

the girl. She had glared at him as if stupefied. With a scream she sprang back and he followed, realizing it was excellent strategy to kill my companion and bar the door against me, leaving his companions to kill me leisurely.

With a howl of fear and warning I dropped the remaining kettle and leaped after him. As my foot touched the threshold the cabin was filled with a deafening explosion and much smoke, and the savage was falling limply into my arms. I hurled him outside, where he fell on his back, his face blown away. The girl was crouching on the floor, her hair partly concealing her face, the Highland pistol clutched in her two hands, and her eyes glaring like a cat's. I was reminded of the scene on Der Hexenkopf.

"Load the rifles!" I cried. Then passing from the cabin and failing to discover any of the enemy in the opening I ran back to the kettle and completed my errand.

With the door secured I surveyed the opening from the rear loophole. Something bronze on the grass, a dozen rods from the forest, attracted my attention and finally resolved itself into an Indian.

"Quick with a gun!" I told her. "There's one out there in the grass."

She sprang to my side with my rifle and gave a glance, and then said:

"La, mister! He won't hurt nobody. That was my first shot when you was gone for water."

"I'm mighty proud to fight by your side," I humbly told her. "That's scarcely correct; for you've done all the fighting—three of the red devils gone and all sent away by you! The Onondaga would be proud of such a record. He would put up a war-post in front of this cabin and mark it with red crosses."

"Lor', mister! One can do a heap when mortal scared," she muttered. "It must be queer to live back near the sea where there ain't any fighting. Course I know you're only funning when you talk like that. And it takes a mighty brave man to fetch water as you did."

She drew back her rebellious hair and deftly twisted it into a knot. This feminine instinct could not be blunted by war and bloodshed. She was frightened as only those can be who confront a horrible death, yet she dressed her hair mechanically and wished to look her best. The faint touch of color in her brown cheeks added to her womanliness.

"My heart stopped pounding when you went with them kettles," she whispered, winking her eyes very fast.

"There was no danger. We must have water. We'll be choking with thirst before night. And if they set the roof afire——"

"I know," she quietly said. "Cal'late I'll be loading that pistol. It shoots most mortal."

We had one large kettle of water. I gazed longingly through the hole by the door and wondered if I could make the stream and fill the other kettle. She read my thoughts as if she were a witch in fact as well as name, and fiercely warned:

"If you go out again I'll go after you. I won't die in here alone. There's a dozen of 'em hiding down there by this time, just waiting for you to try some fool trick."

"There'll be more down there by and by, but we'll wait and see what happens. It's the fire-arrows I'm afraid of."

Leaving her to stand watch, I secured the muskets from the wall and rummaged among the trader's stock until I had found powder and bullets. I loaded the weapons and set them aside. On a shelf I found a small quantity of smoked meat, tough as hickory bark, yet a food could one manage to chew. I told the girl to eat while I took her place at a loophole. So far as the eye could detect there wasn't an Indian nearer than Du Quesne.

"I'm thinking," the girl remarked—the branch of a tree moved slightly and I watched it suspiciously—"I'm thinking there's more'n one way to stop a fire," she went on, raising her voice to attract my attention.

"I'm thinking there's an Indian climbing a tree, but I can't see anything to shoot at," I grumbled. "If it would only rain!"

The sky was brassy with heat-waves but I looked in vain for thunder-clouds.

"I'm light and spry as a cat, and there wouldn't be any danger," she continued.

"What's on your mind, little woman?" I asked without turning from the loophole.

"These contraptious hides is on my mind most heavy. If we could use 'em they'd save what water we've got."

Now I was interested. She was standing by a pile of dried deerskins. She explained:

"If they was on the roof the fire-arrers

would slide off. They're hard and smooth."

Her wit gave me hope, and I asked: "How to make them stay? We haven't time to peg them on. If we try that they'll rush us."

"I'm thinking," she muttered, tilting her small head and holding her chin in her hand. "Course you've saddled a hoss many times. Yes, I cal'late that would do."

Instantly she was all energy. From the collection of smithing tools she secured a sharp-pointed punch and with the back of an ax began making holes along the edge of a hide.

"Don't watch me. Watch outdoors," she sharply retorted and with increased color.

I turned back to the peep-hole. I could hear her pulling the hides about and talking to herself as she worked. She asked herself if she could find some rawhide strips and in the next breath told herself she could at least make some. Then she was cooing in delight. I stole to the door in time to see a bush move near the mouth of the creek. I stopped its agitation with a bullet from my rifle, but doubted if I had done the enemy any damage. Several shots from the opposite end of the cabin took me to the rear loop-hole. I stumbled over a pile of skins in passing but had no time to observe the girl. Two or three balls chunked into the logs, but there was no Indian in sight. Fearing it was a ruse to hold my attention I darted to the door again and remained there while I reloaded my rifle.

"Lawful heart! If you wouldn't keep hypering back and forth," she complained.

"Can't you bring your work here so I can help you?" I meekly inquired.

"I'm thinking it's gitting along pretty fast. We can't make one job of it at a time anyway. I can fix the rest after we've been driven inside. Now you can look."

And she proudly dragged forward two deerskins, looped together by short sections of rawhide.

"We'll saddle the ridge-pole with these just the same as you'd saddle or blanket a hoss," she explained. "That'll be better than pegs. I'll git up on the roof and throw them over the ridge-pole as fast as you pass 'em up to me."

The scheme was feasible. It was simple. It would require but a few minutes to saddle the house with hides. There would remain a strip on each side, but these I could reach from the ground with separate hides. However I objected to her mounting the roof.

"Your job is to pass 'em up to me," she sternly retorted. "My part is as easy as slipping off a wet log. I can be up there before you could git started. If they come at us I can be down and inside the door in a jiffy. Git 'em separated out so's we can work fast."

Then she unbarred the door.

Before showing ourselves we reconnoitered from all sides of the cabin. There was not much danger of a musket ball hitting her slim body; and arrows, to hit the roof must travel so high as to give us warning. I gathered up several sets of the double skins and threw open the door. The savages must have been puzzled by our appearance. None showed along the woods, nor were any lead or arrows fired at us. I dropped the skins and gave the girl a hand, and she was scrambling up to the ridge-pole before the watchers could guess our purpose. I passed up two skins and she deftly draped them over the ridge-pole. I passed up two more. The Indians woke up and began screaming like demons. Guns began banging, and I called to the girl to come down.

"Throw 'em along! I won't budge till you do!" she cried.

I tossed up some more and ducked back to the door and secured both rifles.

"More! More!" she cried.

I handed them up, but warned her:

"Jump down at once. They're coming!"

She took time to fix them properly and then dropped lightly into my arms. Some fifteen savages were breaking cover at different points. I picked out the leader of the nearest band. He commenced leaping from side to side, but I was patient and shot him off his feet. The moment I fired she had taken the empty rifle and had pressed the short French one into my hands. I fired it and missed. We entered the cabin and dropped the bar.

THE Indians advanced swiftly, knowing our rifles were empty. Could they close in before we could reload they planned to thrust their guns through the loop-holes and stop our fire while they battered down the door. But they had not counted on the trade-muskets. We emptied these rapidly. One man went down with a smashed leg. Two of his companions carried him into the woods. The others streaked back as rapidly as they had

advanced. Thus far all the honors were ours. I made the girl drink some water and posted her at the back of the cabin while I covered the other three sides.

The Indians, however, had no stomach for another assault in force, and the forest became quiet. I told the girl she was to remain inside while I stepped out and covered the lower part of the two sides. She hotly refused, saying that if there was no danger for me there was none for her.

"Very well. I can't make you stay in here," I surrendered. "There is no danger to me if you keep watch of the woods behind the cabin. I can watch on two sides. Come along and if they attack from behind——"

"I'll stay and watch," she broke in. I popped out from the door and picked up a hide and slid it into place. Several shots were discharged, but the range was too great, or their guns so inaccurate, that they threw their fire away. The girl called for me to seek shelter, but as she did not fire one of the rifles I remained until I had three skins in place. I would have persisted longer had she not run out to upbraid me, scolding like a vixen. Then began the phase of warfare I had been dreading, the sending of fire-arrows. Like serpents the long shafts, bringing burning rolls of bark, shot high into the hot heavens and fell around the cabin. None hit the roof; and while they were preparing more fire I rushed forth and finished one side of the roof.

The girl scolded me as if I had been a wayward child. Her gravity and seriousness became her prettily. The little lecture was interrupted by another flight of burning arrows. This time they had the range and we heard two strike on the roof. Befor I knew what she was doing she had stepped out to observe how her scheme was working. I followed and picked her up and carried her inside.

"Anyway, mister, there ain't any arrers on the roof," she told me as I stood her on her feet. "Points couldn't git any hold on them skins. Just slithered off."

Between volleys was the golden time for work. I begged her to keep under cover and went to finish patching the south side. This time the foe was waiting for my appearance and delivered a crashing volley the moment I cleared the door. Some of the lead whistled unwholesomely close. A voice shouted loudly and ten Indians, selected for their fleetness of foot, came racing across the opening. It was grimly significant that they were armed with axes only. They were determined to bring the fight to close quarters. I entered the cabin as the girl began firing from the rear loophole.

"Here they come from all directions! They mean it this time!" she cried.

It is unusual for Indians to work themselves up to such a pitch of fury as to attack openly and aggressively a foe behind a strong defense. My knowledge of the Ottawa tongue was slight, but the loud voice shouting from the edge of the woods was crying:

"Be Brave! Go on!"

I caught that much of the red leader's exhortation and itched to have a shot at him as I believed him to be none other than Pontiac. The attack was persisted in until one brave was hacking the door with his ax. It is a peculiar fact that with them at such close quarters none of their number was mortally wounded. Doubtless we were nervous and a bit confused by the attack being pressed on three sides while some of them actually climbed on to the roof and dislodged some of the skins. I have no clear recollection of details. I know we darted from side to side and discharged the two rifles and the muskets. The room was thick with smoke and I recall my fear lest those on the roof should make an opening and jump down upon us.

It was not until they began to fall back that I discovered the girl had been more calm than I, for she had refused to discharge her pistol. I peered from a loophole and saw them running for the woods and not a weapon in the cabin was loaded. One of their number had been hit in the foot and was limping along with two men helping him. Probably he had been hit while climbing on to the roof, his foot coming in range with one of the loopholes as a musket was discharged. It was most fortunate for us that they had not brought any guns with them as it would have been easy for them to thrust the muzzles inside.

I loaded rapidly to get one of the three men making off together, but the moment I opened the door a warning was shouted from the leader in the woods and the wounded man was dropped in a little hollow. His assistants raced off in different directions. The hollow containing the

wounded man was too slight effectually to protect him, and opening the door sufficiently to accommodate my rifle-barrel I would have stirred him up had not the girl thrust her hand over the flint and at the same time pulling me backward. I opened my mouth to rebuke her, but she clapped a hand over my mouth and pointed toward the roof. Then pulling my ear down to her lips she whispered:

"They didn't all quit the roof, mister. I heard a little noise up there."

I nodded and gently closed the door and barred it and cocked my ear. She nudged me as the man on the roof made a faint scraping sound. This was a danger I had never counted upon. To get at the fellow necessitated my leaving the cabin. We began talking to allay any suspicions on his part, and the girl said:

"He's moving along to git directly over the door. We must fool him."

Bidding her to move about at the rear of the cabin and to keep on talking I stepped to the door and, in the notches cut in the logs, so that one might climb to a crevice under the eaves and scrutinize the opening before opening the door, gently placed my feet and pulled myself up until my eyes were at the crevice. My head was close to the roof and as the girl chattered along I heard the telltale sound of the savage working his way down to the eaves and directly over the door.

As I was about to descend I was further rewarded, for a moccasined foot dropped down across my narrow range of vision. The Indian was sitting with one foot hanging down from the eaves and waiting for me to leave the cabin, when he would drop down upon me. The roof was formed of sapling-size poles covered with large sections of thick bark, which in turn was held in place by poles running lengthwise at regular intervals. I drew my knife and gently inserted it between two of the poles, then desisted as at the most I would only prick the fellow and put him on his guard.

Regaining the floor I moved a rough table, which Frazier used for displaying his trade-goods, close to the chimney, and gave the girl an iron rod and directed her to stand on the table and pretend to be making an opening through the roof. She hesitated and asked—

"You're going out?"

"He'll be watching the chimney."

"There may be two of 'em."

I shook my head and held up a finger and directed her to keep talking in a loud voice as she assailed the roof. Then taking the short rifle and loading it I tiptoed to the door and noiselessly removed the bar and waited.

The girl began jabbing the iron rod between two of the poles and calling down to me to mount the table and help her. She made much noise and yet I believed I caught a faint sound from over the door. Lifting on the door so it would not sag and scrape the floor I worked it open wide enough for me to pass out.

"The rod's through the roof!" cried the girl.

At the same time a shout rose from the forest. I darted through the narrow opening and whirled about and raised the rifle. One savage was there and had been on the point of crawling to the ridge-pole to investigate the several inches of iron rod showing through the bark when the yell from the woods had warned him to be on his guard. He must have connected the outcry of his friends with the sudden appearance of the rod, for he was on all fours and staring over his shoulder to where his friends were in hiding.

When he saw me the rifle was at my shoulder. He made a convulsive effort to hurl his ax and roll off the roof, but he was dead before he could throw it.

From the Indians' point of view there should have been but one thing for them to do—return at once with their guns and endeavor to shoot us through the loopholes. At least they could have plugged up the openings and left us helpless until they had destroyed the door. Luckily for us they were not inclined to risk any more of their men. I could hear their leader shouting to them, but if he were exhorting them to charge they had no heart for it. Perhaps they believed our weakness lay in the partly uncovered roof. They renewed the attack with fire-arrows. With loose hides I patched the bare spots as far as I could reach while the girl looped skins together to go over the ridge-pole. I had ignored their musket fire, but when a small bullet whined close to my head I knew some Indian or Frenchman had arrived on the scene with a rifle, and I lost no time in taking cover.

"That sounds like cannon," said the girl as I closed and made fast the door.

"It was a rifle. We must be more careful."

"I know a rifle when I hear it. That's what I mean, mister."

I listened and heard it. It was thunder beyond any doubt. I opened the door a crack and scanned the heavens. There was no storm in sight.

"It's up the Monongahela," I told her. "It's so far off I fear we won't get even the skirts of it."

WE NEEDED much of it; not only to drench the cabin but to cool the air inside. With the door closed and the stout shutter in place over the one small opening that served as a window it was blood-hot in the cabin. The girl's face when light from a loophole streamed in upon it, looked pale and sick. The place was so insufferable from smoke and powder fumes and the heat that I risked a chance shot from the forest by removing the shutter and opening the door. Even then there was scarcely enough air stirring to clear the cabin. The thunder rolled across the sky again and the girl sighed:

"Let's wish it's a smart one and will come this way. I'll never find fault with cold Winters again."

I made her drink some water and with a pewter dish bathed her wrists and slim neck. She complained that I was wasting it, and in the next moment was on the point of weeping as she said no one had been kind to her, except her crippled uncle, since her mother's death. I brushed back her hair and bathed her forehead and washed the smoke and grime from her face and tried to be very gentle with her. I was beginning to realize what a slip of a thing she was to be participating in such grim tragedies. I also appreciated her sturdy spirit.

Suddenly she drew away from me and rearranged her hair and diffidently said:

"You've been master kind to me, mister. I wish I was a witch, like folks in Great Cove say. I'd change you into a hoss, or a bird, and you'd git clear of all this."

"Sit here, just inside the door, while I stand watch. I've never had a chance to wait on such a brave little woman before."

"Boo! That's fooling," she scoffed, and eying me in surprize. "You've been in big settlements. You've seen women, mebbe, who never see a Injun. All they have to do is be brave. If I had a pair of shoes like what some of them settlement women most likely wear I'd die fighting to keep 'em."

"If we get out of this you shall have the gayest pair of shoes to be found in Alexandria," I promised, and I thought of Josephine and her love of luxury and wondered how she would have endured the ordeal of being cornered in a trader's cabin at the mouth of Turtle Creek.

"I ain't used to have folks give me things," she gravely told me. "We'll have to think about that." Then shyly: "Is that where you want me to go? To Alexandria, a real big settlement?"

In truth, I had given no thought as to just where she should go did we escape. Yet how could I give her a pair of shoes in Alexandria if she were not there to recieve them?

"If I go back there, yes. I have no home there now. Like yourself I am homeless."

This pleased her and she snuggled against my knee and murmured:

"I'm thinking it's mighty good that you're like that—no home. You can build a home anywhere. All you need is an ax and some trees. If you'd had a home you'd never have come poking round Great Coye. Lor's love! What *would* have happened to me if you hadn't come along? At Will's Creek, too. And in that other cabin, when I run away. And now here."

"You have nothing to thank me for," I sadly told her. "At all those places you name you have had trouble because I did go to the Cove. Now we'll close the door while I take a look at the woods from the back of the cabin. The Indians are too quiet to suit me."

I bent down to the loophole and immediately called for her to make sure the bar was firmly in place.

"Another fight," she sighed. "And we was having such a talk!"

I heard her reloading her rifle, but did not remove my eye from the hole. Something was slowly approaching the cabin. For a moment I could not make it out, and then glimpsed the top of a feather showing above the strange object. Simultaneously with my discovery the Indians began firing their guns at the front of the cabin and yelling. I paid no heed to the gunfire and the shouting, for the real menace was where the feather bobbed and slowly advanced.

She elbowed me aside and after a glance informed me:

"They've fastened some of the skins together and are holding them in front of them. Wonder if it'll stop a bullet."

I fired my rifle. The moving barricade stopped, and then came on again. The savage, or savages, had difficulty in keeping it in place and their approach was very slow. Exulting cries resounded from the woods as the hidden watchers witnessed how ineffective had been my bullet.

"It can't be dragging on the ground," gritted the girl. "Fire at their feet."

She offered me her gun, but I preferred my own. I finished ramming home the bullet and its greased patch and studied the target. The grass was more than ankle high so it was largely guesswork. I fired and with a howl of pain a warrior released his hold on the crude shield and danced about on one foot.

I grabbed the girl's rifle and fired and missed. I think I swore softly. She pushed me aside and discharged one of the muskets. The explosion was unpleasantly loud and she reeled back from the impact of the recoil. While she ruefully rubbed her shoulder I peered out and was amazed to behold the wounded savage stretched on the ground. His companion, with the long shield hanging over his back, was running for the woods.

"Good shooting!" I yelled. "And with one of those trade-muskets at that!"

"It wa'n't anything to do," she groaned, still caressing her shoulder. "When I loaded 'em the last time I put in a big charge and used a handful of small bullets I found in a bag. I'm thinking they scattered most mortal."

They had. I blamed myself for not having utilized the muskets with similar effectiveness the time the savages charged in force. The slaughter must have been tremendous. In expressing their rage the Indians were screaming until it seemed their lungs must burst. I took my position by the door, fully expecting them to make a charge.

I left the empty musket for the girl to reload and stood all but one of the others against the wall where I could reach them. The voice of the leader kept shouting something and gradually the howling died down. It seemed to be a very long time that I waited, and finally noted how dark the interior of the cabin was growing. Had I not known the position of the sun I would have said it was later than the twilight hour.

"I can't hardly see you, mister," said the girl uneasily. "You look all humped over like a bear."

There came a flare of light through the loopholes that lit up her pale face vividly, and then a tremendous crash and the cabin seemed to rock under the vibrations. Afraid it was too good to be true I stepped to the small window, set high under the eaves, and looked up to the heavens. I could have shouted aloud in joy as I beheld the mighty wall of black and slate towering almost to the zenith with its lead-colored draperies dragging on the horizon.

While we had talked and watched for danger the storm had swept down the river and was upon us. The opening grew dusky and it would have been an easy task for the savages to have crawled close in the uncertain light. Again the Thunder-god hurled a spear at the water-serpent and the noise of the contest transcended all earth sounds. A strange moaning ran through the forest-crown and lofty tops bowed and swayed although as yet there was no air moving in the opening.

"I'm thinking it's going to rain," remarked the girl in a faint voice.

"Thank God, yes! Stay back there to see they try no tricks," I cautioned as she came toward me.

The lightning ripped across the face of the clouds, and the girl gave a little squeal. I went to her to learn what was the matter.

"Not Injuns," she whispered. "I'm thinking I'm scared of these sort of storms."

It seemed impossible that one who had shown such absolute control of nerves could be frightened by a flash of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And yet she was clinging to me like a child, striving to conquer herself and yet keeping her face pressed against my fringed sleeve so as not to see the glare of the bolts. I endeavored to soothe away her fears by telling her the storm was our best friend; that it would make the cabin fire-proof, that it would compel the Indians to keep their guns covered and their bow-strings protected from the rain. But as I talked I could feel her wince convulsively each time the god renewed the ancient strife.

With a deafening roar the rain came battering against the cabin. It was impossible to distinguish an object fifty feet

from the door. Now was the time for the enemy to attack and cut their way into us and finish us with their belt weapons. Raising my voice above the terrific drumming of the rain I told the girl:

"We'll go. The rain will wash out our trail. Find something to wrap around the rifles."

MASTERING her weakness to a certain degree she found some oiled skins and we wrapped them about our rifles. I opened the door. The water was falling in torrents and the wind was blowing with great velocity. Closing the door we were plastered against the walls for a moment by the force of the wind. I sought to shelter her by holding her close to my side; and leaning against the storm we made for the woods. We could not talk and we scarcely could see because of the rain filling our faces. We both realized that such a downpour could not last long. Our progress was slow, but finally I was waist-deep in some cherry-bushes. We fought through these and came to dripping trees and entered among them.

The uproar of the storm suddenly lessened now that we were walking on ancient forest mold and were sheltered from the wind. Dull booming sounds told us when some weakly-rooted monarch gave up the fight and plunged to earth and carried the surrounding lesser growth with it. Rivulets of water ran under our feet and there was no need to hide our trail until we were two miles in the woods.

The walking became easier and more dangerous. The fine mist seeping down through the trees was not sufficient to wash away our tracks. We had to exercise caution in placing our feet, and we bore farther from the river where the rising ground would afford us firmer footing. We were as wet as two river-rats.

It became strangely quiet in the dripping woods and we no longer shouted to make ourselves heard. How the storm was raging outside we could only guess. I feared it was abating.

"They'll lose some time, mister, in making sure we're not in the cabin," the girl philosophically remarked. "And it's gitting so dark they can't find our tracks even if we do leave some."

"We must find a place under a rock where we can make a fire and you can dry out."

She laughed at me, and her voice was most musical because it was natural.

"Hard work to drown a witch," she said. "I've fared hard before this and didn't mind it."

I remembered those days when the House of the Open Hand entertained and when beauty must be gently wrapped in waterproof coverings and sent home in coaches. This wild young creature at my side had done a man's work and more. She was made up of the outdoors. Her only weakness was her fear of lightning.

It grew very dark, and without stars to guide us we would have wandered blindly if not for a little run that we stumbled upon and which I remembered flowed parallel to Turtle Creek. We took to the water, knee-deep because of the rain, and worked our way up-stream by clutching at the overhanging boughs. We finally left the stream where a windfall had smothered it. It was impossible to skirt the fallen timber in the darkness. By the sense of touch alone I found a spot clear of brush and undergrowth and informed my companion we must wait for daylight before proceeding. I could find no dry fuel, even had I dared to build a fire.

"We have water, but no fire nor food," I told her.

"You're wrong, mister, about food. I fetched this along," she answered; and her hands found mine with a small package wrapped in deerskin.

It was some of Frazier's smoked meat which she had had the forethought to bring along. It was tough, but it was food, and we chewed it vigorously and felt the better for having eaten it.

"Lean against me," I commanded. "It'll be dreary waiting."

"Not so dreary as when we was in the cabin, waiting," she replied. And her head rested against my shoulder and very soon I rejoiced to find she was asleep.

When she was entirely oblivious to our discomforts I shifted her into my lap, and thus we passed the night; she sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion and I afraid to move lest I disturb her. Near morning I dozed off and was aroused by her hand pressing lightly on my shoulder. I came to my feet and rubbed my legs and arms to drive out the kinks and cramps. She whispered for me to make no noise, and I noted she had removed the coverings from the guns.

"What is it?" I murmured, a terrible rage sweeping over me as I glared about to discover the relentless foe.

She shook her head and said—

"I thought I heard something moving toward us." Footsteps would fall softly on the wet ground, and, after listening without hearing anything, I told her:

"Some animal got the scent of us and turned tail."

Her small hand gripped my arm for silence. Men were coming. I heard a voice say something in the Delaware tongue. She pulled her Highland pistol from her blouse and noiselessly removed its wrapping. Then her hand found mine and gave it a convulsive squeeze, and her soft voice was saying:

"Mister, you've been powerful good to me. We've made a good fight for it. It won't be awful hard this way. Don't let 'em catch you alive. If I go first I'll be waiting for you."

I gently pushed her behind me and she sank at the foot of a tree. I drew my ax and knife and placed them beside me as I sank to one knee and gathered up the two rifles. Over my shoulder I whispered:

"Don't use the pistol on any Indian. Remember!"

"We must go faster," said a voice in Delaware, only I knew it was a white man speaking. "They'll follow us very fast."

I shivered with a thrill of hope, but dared not give any encouragement to the girl. I glanced back at her. Her face showed none of the anger I had witnessed at The Witches' Head when she was menaced by the mob. It was placid of expression, and she met my gaze with a little smile of encouragement. We could hear them making their way along the windfall. Suddenly they burst into view: two Indians and a white man. One of the Indians was carrying a fresh scalp fastened to the end of a short rod.

I reached back and snatched the pistol from the girl's hand and cried out—

"If that be Christopher Gist we are friends."

The three vanished as if by magic. After a few moments the white man replied:

"I am Gist. Who are you? Speak sharp. My Indians are nervous."

"Black Brond, returning from a scout to Du Quesne. I have a young friend with me." In Delaware I added, "Tell your friends we are your friends, and that there is a large band of Pontiac's men chasing us."

CHAPTER IX

THE FATAL ERRAND

THIS meeting with Gist and his two Indians was most pleasing to us, although the Delawares did not care enough for our company to slacken their pace. They ranged ahead while Gist traveled with us. He gave us much news. On July third the Indians had refused to go on a scout, but on the following day two had been induced to accompany him. The three of them had advanced to within half a mile of the fort and had been deterred from approaching closer because of the excitement occasioned by the escape of the girl, the Onondaga and myself. They did not know what had happened, but with so much yelling and howling and running into the woods the Delawares had taken fright and declared the entire red force was starting to attack the army. Two Indians had sighted Gist and had chased him for some distance. The Delawares surprized and scalped the Frenchman the Dinwold girl had stumbled upon among the bramble-bushes.

Gist said he and his companions had attempted to follow Turtle Creek to its head, where they had expected to find the army, but had been turned back by a large band of savages coming down the creek. They had taken refuge in a windfall and had remained in hiding throughout the violent storm. This delay permitted the girl and me to get in advance of them. In scouting to the neighborhood of the fort they had found the fords open and without any signs of an ambuscade being prepared. Nor had they discovered any trace of the enemy's savages being outside the immediate vicinity of the fort until the night of our escape.

When he set out from the army camp Braddock was about to march to Thicketty Run, a small branch of Sewickley Creek. Time had been lost at Jacobs' Creek in waiting for Colonel Dunbar's provision-train to come up. Many of St. Clair's road-builders were on the sick list, and quite a number of them had died. The wagon horses were in miserable condition. Major Washington was too ill to travel and had not rejoined the army up to July fourth.

"You have nothing but bad talk in your bag," I remarked.

"We have one French scalp," he grimly replied. "And since June twenty-fifth Braddock has been paying five pounds apiece for scalps. But none of our scouts are getting rich on the bounties. If we could only get ahead faster, and reach the fort before all our soldiers are dead, or too sick to fight, we'd win just by showing ourselves. Mr. William Shirley, the general's secretary, is very much disgusted and discouraged at the way things are being managed. He says he doubts our success. But talk like that is all foolishness, of course. If we can only hold out till we reach Du Quesne we'll whip the French easy enough."

Our course was to the head of Sewickley Creek, which was but a few miles north of the Thicketty Run camp. The night's rest had done the girl much good and she did not appear to have any trouble in keeping up with us. I wanted to carry her rifle, and thereby aroused her indignation. Almost all the talk was between Gist and me, although I made several attempts to get some expression from her. She preferred to keep at our heels and hold her tongue. Once, while Gist was climbing a tree to look for smoke from the army's camp-fires, she asked me—

"Does he know I ain't a man?"

"I forgot to tell him. Think I must have been forgetting the truth myself," I answered.

"Keep on forgetting, and don't tell him," she curtly requested.

"I shall never forget how you stood by me and did a man's share of the fighting," I told her, somehow sensing she was displeased at something I had said, or left unsaid.

"Will the army be at Thicketty Run?" she asked.

"No one knows where it'll be," I sorrowfully replied. "It should be well on its way to the head of Turtle Creek. It was at the Run two days ago, and I'm afraid it isn't far from there now. If it's moved north we'll cut its line of march. Dunbar's provision-train will be stretched out over a long distance. If it is still wasting time at the Run we'll shift our course and find it there."

"That man Braddock don't know how to lead an army through this sort of country. He'll git licked."

"You should be ashamed for saying that," I rebuked. "The army moves slowly, but as it goes by the head of Turtle Creek it can kill time till snow flies and yet take the fort. Captain Beaujeu told me at the fort that he could do nothing but run if the creek course was taken."

"Don't go and git mad at me, mister. I ain't used to armies and soldiers. Wonder where that Injun, Round Paw, is just about this time."

"He should be several miles south of us and moving parallel to us. Today is the sixth. It'll all be settled inside of four or five days."

Gist came down from the tree and reported haze or smoke a few miles ahead. He was skeptical about its being smoke as the army ought to be in motion and not in camp. The Dinwold girl abruptly spoke up and declared—

"I feel like we was being followed."

Gist looked at her curiously and asked—

"Do you pretend to hear and see things that Brond and me can't see, nor hear?"

"If I was a woman folks would say I was a witch," she gravely replied, meeting his gaze steadily.

He glanced back through the shadowy woods and assured us—

"I believe the Indians who chased you two have gone back to the fort."

"My feeling is that only one or two men are following us," she qualified.

"Younkers often feel that way when in Indian country," he carelessly remarked.

His indifference irritated her, and she stoutly insisted—

"Some one's chasing us."

"Our danger will be ahead, from the Indians hanging to the flanks of the army," I told her. "We may have some trouble in cutting through their line."

She tucked her rifle under her arm and trotted along behind us. She had had her say and was not inclined to talk further. Curiously enough I soon found myself glancing backward, and each time I did so I met her questioning gaze and felt ashamed.

At last I had to admit to myself that her words had put a foolish notion into my head. Of course one might be followed whenever alone in the forest, but as yet there was no evidence that we were being dogged. I fought against the idea, and then told Gist:

"Keep on going. I'll overtake you within

the next mile. I'm going to watch our back track for a bit."

He sped on, with the girl running a few rods behind him. I settled down between two trees and condemned myself for giving way to a silly fancy. My view of the forest was limited, but I watched faithfully. A slight noise behind me made me duck and twist my head. Instead of keeping after Gist the Dinwold girl had turned back to share my spying. I nodded to her and resumed searching the low arches that radiated in every direction from our position. She sank down beside me and clasped her hands about her knees and watched my frowning face rather than the woods.

"You think I'm queer, don't you, mister?" she softly asked.

"I believe you're notional," I retorted. "We'll be traveling after Gist."

"Look!" she whispered.

I was in time to catch a suggestion of motion near a walnut. I watched the tree suspiciously, and from the corner of my eye detected a flicker of something off to one side.

"I saw it," murmured the girl, resting an elbow on her knee and making ready for a quick shot.

But she did not see it again, nor did I. Close at hand a low voice called out:

"'*Ha-hum-weh!*' My white brother and the witch-woman should be traveling like the deer;" and Round Paw the Onondaga stepped from cover and stood beside us.

"The witch-woman's medicine told her some one was following us. We waited," I explained.

"She is *arendiouanen*," he gravely said. "The Wolf runs long and fast, from Allaquippa's Town to find the army. The bone-breaking man took your talk down the Youghiogeny and will follow up Sewickley Creek if the ghosts of the *Hathawekela* buried there do not stop him."

The Hathawekela were the principal division of the Shawnee and claimed to be the "elder brothers" of that nation. I had been in Old Sewickley Town on the Allegheny, twelve miles above Du Quesne, one of their villages. The Onondaga firmly believed that the ghosts of their ancient dead could, if they so desired, stop the passing of either red or white man.

"The man Cromit will reach the army. The Shawnee ghosts will not stop him. They have not stopped the English, who traveled down the Susquehanna, the Conemaugh, and the Kiskiminetas; and their dead are buried along those streams."

"Ghosts place traps," he uneasily muttered. "They may make a trap for Braddock and his Swannocks."

"What is he talking about, mister?" asked the girl as we followed after Gist.

"Only some nonsense about Shawnee ghosts waylaying Cromit if he goes up Sewickley Creek."

"I dreamed last night of a dead English soldier."

"Then keep it to yourself. If our friend knew that he would accept it as a warning of Braddock's defeat."

Round Paw caught enough of her English to be curious, but I did not interpret it fully and etiquette restrained him from questioning closely. Gist left a plain trail for us to follow but did not hold back for us to overtake him. We did not sight him until within two miles of the army's camp on Thicketty Run.

The head of the army was well under way for Rush Creek, an eastern branch of Turtle, but a portion of it was still in the camp as shown by the smoke from the many fires. We fell in with a long line of wagons that was laboriously making its way over the road hewn through the forest by the axmen. I talked with a young wagoner, Dan Morgan by name, and he told me that the army had lost twenty-four hours at Thicketty Run.

THE Dinwold girl was showing weariness, and I found room for her in Morgan's wagon. An escort with several wagons filled with sick soldiers was about to start for Will's Creek. I endeavored to persuade her to go back with the escort, but all the time I was talking she was shaking her head. There was a number of women along with the train, but how many I never could learn as their names were not on the rolls. She would have the company of her sex, yet I was much depressed, and not a little provoked, at her stubbornness. We left her in young Morgan's wagon and went up the line.

The wagon-train was alarmed by rifle-fire in the woods; then Cromit appeared, trailing his long rifle. He had been mistaken for a French scout and had barely escaped the bullets of some of our flankers. He was but little worse for his hasty travel

and grinned broadly on beholding us, and more broadly when the Onondaga refused to shake hands with him.

"Allaquippa's Injuns are hiding in the woods, scared of the French," he told me. "There's going to be a vastly severe wring before we finish this business."

"We march by the head of Turtle Creek. The Indians will refuse to attack. The French can do nothing alone," I informed him.

"There's going to be a mighty tough wring," he insisted. "I've dreamed again of the witch-girl."

"She's back in one of the wagons. She'll put a spell on the French."

He was much interested in my news and prophecies, and by his glances toward the rear I surmised he was wishing himself back beside the girl's wagon. Yet he maintained that to dream of her instead of "t'other one" meant bad luck. He philosophically decided it was an ill omen for him personally and perhaps did not concern the general welfare of the army.

We passed a covered wagon in which Major Washington, a very sick man, was traveling. He had overtaken the rear of the army two days before, July fourth. I have no doubt he would have wished to question me, but I knew he must indeed be ill when he could not ride a horse, and thought it best not to make my presence known.

Before we caught up with the staff we learned that some of our rangers had fired on several of our Indian scouts, mistaking them for French Indians, and had killed Scarouady's son. Scarouady, an Oneida chief, was known among the Delaware as Monactuatha, but had been called the Half-King by the English since the death of Half-King Scruniyatha in the preceding year.

The slaying of his son was a terrible error as it might easily have resulted in the complete alienation of our few Indians. But Scarouady was above the average Indian in intelligence and was as devoted to the colonies as he was hostile to the French.

They had buried the youth with suitable ceremonies the day before we reached the army and had covered his bones with the gift of an elaborate red coat to the bereaved father. Yet the tragedy had a lasting effect on the Indians. Round Paw told me that the Delaware scouts were asking each other—

"If the English shoot us what won't the French do?"

A shadow seemed to hang over the entire length of the slowly moving army. The militia were outspoken in their pessimism because they were not turned loose to fight in the only way they had been accustomed. The regulars were facing their task with grim visages, wondering what chance they could have in this strange, wild land when the woodsmen were so downcast.

We reached the staff just as a halt was made for the officers to eat their poor rations. General Braddock sat apart from the others, and we were not allowed to

approach him. He appeared to me to be dispirited over the condition and sluggishness of the army, and disgruntled with several of his officers. How much the last conclusion was due to my observation, and how much to the report Cromit had brought me after Beauvais escaped from the road-builders' camp I can not say. Undoubtedly Cromit's talk influenced my decision, as I saw him there within seventy-two hours of his bloody death.

Of one thing I was positive, and I hold to that opinion today: General Braddock was convinced that whatever he won must be achieved by his personal efforts. I did talk with Mr. Shirley, the commander's secretary, who said he would make a verbal report of what I had learned while in Du

Quesne. Whether he ever did submit the information I brought I can not say, but I believe that he did because of his fear that the campaign was being mismanaged. I can easily imagine Braddock listening to my important information and giving it only a passing consideration, or else ignoring it entirely. That night the army camped at Rush Creek, where Scarouady once had a village.

We were now within three easy marches of Du Quesne, even though the army moved sluggishly; and I could not perceive any reason why we should not attain our objective. After all, I told Gist and Cromit, sickness and death was ever the price paid when a large body of men, more or less strangers to their environment, pass through a virgin country. I took it for granted that on every level battlefield of Europe sickness stalked every army.

Cromit had not much to say because of the bias furnished by his dream. Gist spoke guardedly and said that while some phases of the campaign were not to his liking still we ought to take the fort now we were committed to the Turtle Creek course.

While we were talking Sir John St. Clair and several officers came along and St. Clair called out to us:

"You men must know this country. You will come along with us to reconnoiter."

We fell in behind them and were soon descending the steep bank that is a characteristic of the country's streams. Nor was the opposite bank any more inviting.

St. Clair studied the banks thoughtfully for a minute and then said to his officers:

"This is very bad. The army has lost heart because of rough travel. If the country beyond is as bad as this it will about finish any spirit that's left."

"It will be impossible to take the artillery and wagons any farther than this bank, Sir John, unless we spend much time preparing both banks," said one of the engineers.

"That is very plain," muttered St. Clair. "And that's the —— of it."

"If you can get your guns and wagons across I can soon take you to a ridge that leads to Du Quesne," spoke up Gist. "Once you are on the ridge you won't have much trouble; and you'll find the country open and not fitted for ambuscades, or surprize attacks."

As he was serving as guide to General Braddock and was well-known in colonial affairs his words were listened to. St. Clair suggested he try to find a more favorable crossing. He told them there was not much choice as the banks continued much the same, but he did lead them to where the approach to the creek was less difficult, and pointed out a thinly timbered elevation as being the ridge.

The chief engineering problem was to cross the creek and ascend the opposite bank. One young lieutenant said, if he could have the use of a hundred soldiers, he could ease the wagons and guns down one slope and haul them up the other by means of the long cables carried with the army. Another, who had charge of the axmen, guaranteed readily to make runways of logs and thereby greatly expedite the passage of the guns and wagon-train.

Gist called on me to repeat what I already had told Mr. Shirley. I stated if the army would cross the creek and strike straight for Du Quesne it could not be attacked with any degree of success even if the Indians could be induced to attack at all. I quoted Captain Beaujeu to that effect. As they did not cut me short I added, for good measure, that there would be great danger at both crossings of the Monongahela and that it would be practically impossible to avoid an ambuscade, that Beaujeu already had planned to plant an ambush along the river-road.

Sir John seemed to be strongly impressed by my statements, much more so than he would have been had I made a similar talk at Alexandria, or Will's Creek. When we returned to the camp we fully believed the morrow's march would remove us from all fear of a masked attack. The conversation among the officers all pointed to this wise maneuver, and our spirits greatly improved.

After Sir John had talked with Braddock Gist was sent for. Cromit and I left Round Paw holding a powwow with the few Delawares while we went to find the Dinwold girl.

WAGONER MORGAN was one of the first teamsters to arrive despite the sad condition of his horses. He informed us that our little friend was sharing a kettle with two soldiers' wives. We soon located her. She had made her sex known to the women but still wore her masculine garb, which was very sensible

of her. I took her aside for a little talk and at once observed she was in a sober mood. In fact, she seemed to be more downcast than when we were fighting for our lives in the Frazier cabin. I endeavored to cheer her up, and pointed out how thankful we should be for our deliverance from Pontiac's savages.

"That was the frying-pan," she sighed. "I tell you I feel bad luck, mister. They'll jump on us when we pass through the thick woods. Them soldiers don't know any more about Injuns than as if they was so many cows."

"You shouldn't say such things. You'll take the heart out of the men if they hear you."

"I ain't a fool even if I come from a family of witches," she angrily retorted. "I'm talking to you, not to the soldiers." Then with instant repentance: "I didn't go for to speak to you like this, mister. But these women here are scared. And yet all they talk about is the silks and fine clothes they'll have when we march into Du Quesne. You'll come and talk again with me tomorrer, mister? You've done so much for me."

"I'll talk with you. I've done nothing. You're hitching the cart ahead of the horse. If not for you I never could have left the Du Quesne stockade."

"I tell you it was the Injun who done all that."

"After you had told him of my danger and had planned for us to scale the water-gate and find you waiting with a canoe. I'll see you tomorrow, and the next day; and on the third day I'll see that you get some of the fine cloth—if the French don't burn everything before leaving the fort."

"I feel bad luck, but I'll hope for the best," she muttered. "And don't go into danger, mister."

The last was so incongruous after what we had been through together, and in view of the part I must play as scout, that I laughed and even she smiled, albeit a bit wistfully. She gave me her small hand and eyed me with strange steadiness; then disconcerted me by gravely saying:

"There ain't no shroud around you yet. I'm thinking you'll live through it."

Cromit came up in time to hear the last and anxiously inquired—

"What about me, missy?" His mouth was smiling, but his eyes were uneasy.

She hesitated, then told him—

"Any one you come to grips with will die."

With this she abruptly left us and busied herself at the fire.

We went to where the rangers were camping and looked for Major Washington, but he had not yet reported to Braddock. I did meet Captain Busby, however. He had lost much of his stoutness and was as lean and hard as a hound.

"Webster Brond, by all that's quaint!" he cried on recognizing me. And this time he was eager to clasp my hand. "I've looked for you all along this cursed march and through all the cursed days we've crawled and fiddled away the time. Lord! But I'm glad the Alexandria folks can't see what a rough-looking lot we are. Where have you been and what do you think we'll do next?"

I explained, and he declared my Du Quesne trip displayed —— rare sportsmanship. I told him the worst of the campaign was over and that we would be free from Indian attacks after we had crossed the creek and had taken to the ridge.

"A fight would be very welcome," he testily replied. "It's this —— crawling along, like a worm on a leaf, that takes the gimp out of the men. If you'd stayed with us from the time we quit Will's Creek you'd understand how trifles can eat the heart out of a man. Wood-ticks annoy more people than tigers do. Really, we officers of the Virginians have given up our luggage-animals until we scarcely have anything left except what we have on. I hope there'll be some clean linen at Du Quesne. If there isn't I'll never forgive the French. I suppose the folks back home are thinking tonight that we're already in Du Quesne."

There was no "back home" for me, no folks to learn how I had fared; and I had nothing to say. He ran on:

"I've sent word to Josephine by every express, but probably she hasn't received one out of five of my letters. I told her I hadn't seen you. So you don't expect we'll be attacked by the red devils on our way to the fort?"

"Not if we follow the ridge-road. Yes, if we follow the river-road."

"Then I'm glad it's the ridge. Remember, Web, how we used to play at fighting Indians and always planned to run into an ambuscade and make a very narrow

escape? Lord, that seems a million years ago. We didn't want any open ridge marching in those days. Nothing but bloody fighting in the shrubbery at the foot of the Carlyle gardens. And how we used to rescue fair maidens! How Joe would squeal, she was that nervous; and how cool and collected the Haze girls always were! Joe was more fun—she felt her part more. Web, our hearts were higher then than now. Time has made cowards of us—of me, anyway. And who would have believed that we would be here together like this on the shore of the —— creek! Thank God that Joe isn't here to be rescued!"

"Amen to that!" And I wished and wished that the witch-girl was as safe as Josephine of old Alexandria.

He urged me to share mess with him and several others from the home town, but I was uneasy and preferred to take a piece of meat from the rangers' fire and to prowl deep in the woods for fresh signs until the darkness drove me in.

WHEN the drums beat the long march on the morning of the seventh I turned out to assist in getting the wagons across the creek. But what was my amazement to learn that the course had been changed during the night's council, and that St. Clair had finally decided it would be best for the army to swing clear of the rugged country entirely and to march direct for the Monongahela.

This would necessitate crossing at a point where the river bends to the north and, after marching across the bend, to recross just below the mouth of Turtle Creek. This shift in plans was due to the excellent fords and their gently sloping banks. There would be no difficulty in crossing the guns and wagons. Destiny was taking the Dinwold girl and me back to the Frazier cabin.

I hunted up the Onondaga and found him freshly painted for war and softly reminding his *orenda* that he was a man of the Wolf clan. After finishing his chanting he cried out to me:

"Yo-hah! They say some very brave men will die before two more sleeps, white brother. They say it is not good for men to grow old until they find all meat tough."

"The French will die bravely if they fight," I agreed.

"They say the French will not die alone. It will be a very strong fight."

"There will be no fight unless Beaujeu can drive his Indians into making a surprize attack."

"There will be a fight," he gravely assured me. "Many axes will be covered with new paint (blood). They say the English from over the stinking water do not know how to fight."

"The Delawares have told you that. They talk like old women."

"A wolf howled in the night to the Wolf man," he corrected. "The talk of our nephews, the Leni-lenapes, goes by Round Paw's ears without entering. Let the Witch-woman change herself into a bird and fly away."

"Let my red brother keep that talk shut up in his bag," I warned, secretly alarmed by his reference to the Dinwold girl. For should there be a fight with the fort Indians I feared she would refuse to hide in a wagon until it was over; and it did seem a cruel shame that after escaping from Frazier's cabin she should run the risk of being hideously killed within gunshot of it.

"Let her turn herself into a bird and fly back to the Susquehanna," he called after me.

I hastened on, eager to find the girl and persuade her to stay well back among the wagons. Even if we were ambushed and well-blooded she would be safe at the rear of the line. The savages could never break through even though they should punish the head of the army.

She greeted me shyly and was strangely willing to do as I asked. I was surprized and pleased with her acquiescence; for I knew she had but little thought for her own safety. There was, however, a small condition attached to her promise; and she expressed it thus:

"I'll do as you ask, mister; but before the fighting begins, if there is any, I want to see you for a minute. If there's sure to be fighting, come back to me. I'll be near the first wagon."

"If it is possible I'll do that," I agreed, glad to make any terms that would insure her safety.

There was some delay in starting although the drums had pounded out the "long march." It seems that General Braddock wished to examine the Rush Creek shore personally before breaking camp. Now my

hopes were high again; but, alas! The precipitous banks impressed him as being too much of an obstacle to overcome now we were so close to the fort. And during the few minutes he walked along the banks and scowled at the rugged shore over the stream the fate of an army and of a continent was decided.

I felt a great regret that the ridge-road was not followed, but I fully believed the river-road would, at the most, cost some lives. It was not given to the Onondaga, nor even to the witch-girl, to read the next few hours.

It was near midday before we got in motion. Gist was already out with the Delawares. Round Paw, Cromit, and I took to the woods together, but quickly separated and scouted toward Turtle Creek. When we came back to camp that night we made the same report—no signs of any enemy Indians in numbers. Our Delawares had exchanged shots with a few French Indians, but no scalps were brought in.

During the day the army had followed the valley of Long Run for a distance of about eight miles in a southwesterly course, so slowly did we move, and had made camp on the slope between the Monongahela and a rivulet called Crooked Run. Throughout the night the wagons kept coming in and I slept but little.

In the morning—July eighth—Major Washington arrived and insisted on exchanging the covered wagon for a horse. He showed his illness very plainly and was not fit to be in the saddle. He was a young man, younger than I, and yet his face was very grave. I saw him when he went to participate in a council with the commander and the field-officers. I was waiting near when he came from the conference in company with Sir Peter Halket. Sir Peter's visage was very melancholy and not good for the regulars to see. The two of them ended their conversation close by me, and as I was there first there was no reason why I should plug my ears.

Sir Peter said:

"I urged upon him to have every foot of the ground examined, and you heard what he replied; that he refused to lose time beating the forest for red Indians as Highland hunters beat the woods in driving out game. But, methinks, we could well take a lesson from those same Highland hunters."

"It will be a great fault if we do not seize the fords at the least," said Major Washington. "Even were that done there will remain much danger. The French will never abandon Du Quesne without making a fight. But we must have good courage. The French Indians do not want to fight. Our only danger will be in a panic seizing upon the regulars."

"You may dismiss that fear," Sir Peter haughtily replied. "His Majesty's Guards know their duty too well, thank God! If the provincials will hold, there need be no fear concerning the soldierly qualities of the Guards."

"I am convinced the provincials will hold, Sir Peter," crisply assured Major Washington.

Thereupon they parted with ceremonious bows and Major Washington beheld me for the first time. He greeted me warmly, as an old friend. I had to tell him my experience as a guest of Captain Beaujeu, and he requested me to repeat what the captain had said about laying an ambuscade at the crossings. When I had finished he said:

"It does look as if the Indians are failing him at the last moment. Our scouts report there are no signs of Indians at either crossing. There's nothing to hinder us seizing both fords now. And yet we should always beware of the enemy. Better overrate him than to underrate him. Well, Webster, take good care of yourself. If the impossible does happen it must be the colonials who hold the enemy back until the regulars can get their bearings."

Again he shook my hand, and I could see he was still very weak from his illness and was anxious to snatch a bit of rest before we were in motion again.

Early that evening the word was passed that St. Clair was to push forward at once a strong force so as to make both fords secure. For some reason he abandoned this plan, which might have eliminated all chances of a massacre. Perhaps General Braddock opposed it, although I was afterward told by Captain Orme that Braddock never passed upon it.

Could we have but known that night what had gone on in Du Quesne the entire history of this country might have read differently; always providing we had taken advantage of our knowledge. As it transpired later the de Normanville brothers on

July eighth reported to Beaujeu that our army was eighteen miles from the fort. Beaujeu at once, and in a desperate mood, harangued the Indians. The red men told him he was mad to propose an attack on such an army. Yet such was his influence over them that they did not flatly refuse the venture but did ask a day in which to think over his bold project. Thus, this very night after I had spoken with Major Washington the commandant at Du Quesne was gloomily facing the hours that separated him from July ninth, the day he was to accomplish so much for France and leave a memory that was soon to be forgotten!

But we knew nothing of all this, and Sir John did not take steps to make the double crossing of the Monongahela safe. However, General Braddock did realize the necessity of doing in part what Sir Peter Halket had urged him to do thoroughly, and at three of the clock of the morning of the ninth he sent Gage forward to secure the two crossings and to hold the further shore of the second until the army should come up.

Round Paw and I were awake when this detachment started and we did not go back to sleep again. Cromit had found Simon Flax among the wagons and had joined his mess. At four o'clock in the morning St. Clair followed after Gage with the road-builders. Braddock posted four hundred men on the surrounding heights and started for the first crossing at six in the morning.

Round Paw and I acted as scouts, although it has been erroneously charged that Braddock had no scouts out. Such statements are absurd. The entire army, including the wagons and guns, made the first crossing without any hindrance; and it did seem as if the road to Du Quesne was open before us. We marched in order of battle to the second ford, and saw nothing of the enemy. Gage had carried out his instructions, and the last crossing was clear and the prize was almost within our grasp.

A band of twenty of the enemy's Indians had been seen, but these had run away in fright. It lacked an hour before midday when we reached the second crossing, but it was not until two hours later that the banks were pronounced safe for the artillery and the wagons. In another hour the army had passed this ford.

The Onondaga and I were in advance and halted to watch this final passage of the river. For the benefit of any French scouts the troops had been ordered on dress parade. It was a wonderful spectacle, and my heart beat high with pride. Round Paw sounded his "Yo-hah!" as he gazed on the soldiers wearing their best uniforms and carrying arms that shone like silver. To add to our enthusiasm the colors were waving and the drums were rolling out the "Grenadiers' March."

As the disciplined files steadily approached, long lines of scarlet and gold, I could not believe the sturdy fellows ever would be thrown into confusion let Beaujeu act as cunningly and audaciously as he might. As they came on it was easy to pronounce them inexorable of purpose, a relentless war-machine that could not be stopped. That last passage of the river was the high point of my hopes: the Lilies over Du Quesne were as good as down. In this brave and inspiring fashion was the bulk of the army drawn up in battle array near the Frazier cabin.

There would be no fight, I said to the Onondaga. He muttered—

"The man of the Wolves sees only red paint."

I remembered my promise to the Dinwold girl, and as there might be a skirmish between our rangers and the retreating enemy I went back to the wagons. She was waiting for me behind the covered wagon in which Major Washington had overtaken the army.

"We'll be in the fort before sunset," I hurriedly told her. "I must get back to be among those who go ahead."

"If I could go with you——"

"Remember your promise," I rebuked her. "I have come as I said I would. Now do you keep back with the wagons. There may be a few bullets flying about the head of the army. And just why did you want to see me, little woman?"

She flushed and then lost her color, and whispered:

"There is a shroud around the man Cromit. I wanted you to come back to see if one had grown about you."

She stared at me as if looking through me and at something far beyond; then she gave a little laugh and winked back the tears and in great relief murmured:

"You have no shroud. Thank the good God for that. The Onondaga——"

"Put no shroud on him," I hastily interrupted. "For if you do, and he knows it, he will feel bound to get himself killed."

"I say nothing about the Indian. Kiss me, mister."

That kiss was most unreal, like something happening in a dream, and yet I found it greatly to my liking; a fact that surprized me much. She was so abrupt in her demand—it was more that than an invitation—that I had obeyed and was hurrying back to the Onondaga before I had fully analyzed my emotions.

Round Paw spoke to me sharply, and I did not understand what he said. He trotted off and I followed him.

"My white brother is as one who has talked with ghosts," he told me over his shoulder.

THE order of march from the second ford had the guides and engineers and six light horse following the scouts. Gage's detachment and the working party under St. Clair came next. Some distance behind these last came the line, preceded by light horse with four squads acting as flankers. Then followed the sailors and a subaltern proudly leading twenty grenadiers, one twelve-pounder supported by a company of grenadiers. The vanguard proper followed, and behind it came the artillery and wagon-trains, and the rearguard. Flanking parties were out on both sides.

I saw nothing of Cromit and had time only to wave my hand to Busby before the Onondaga had led me around a bend in the road. At that time General Braddock with the main army was well back toward the ford, and the advance column of some three hundred men was well-advanced between two unsuspected ravines. Halfway between these two divisions was another column of two hundred men.

Had we had any knowledge of the hidden ravines it would have been an easy matter for Gage's pioneers to have taken possession of them. Gage's command had passed beyond the spot where the main battle was soon to be fought and must have just finished ascending the second gentle slope when the Onondaga gave an explosive grunt, seized my arm, and pulled me behind some trees. I saw figures moving toward us from the direction of the fort, but supposed them to be some of the enemy's scouts reconnoitering the army.

"They are charging us!" cried the Onondaga. And sounding his war-whoop he fired at the figures now swiftly bounding forward.

I also fired and stopped a savage. But I did not believe the affair would amount to anything more than an exchange of shots between the scouts until I recognized Captain Beaujeu at the head of a mixed force of French and Indians. On the breast of his fringed hunting-shirt was a silver gorget, a pleasing target had I not emptied my rifle at the savage.

A moment after I fired Beaujeu halted and waved his hat above his head, and the Indians scattered to left and right. This maneuver puzzled me, for we knew nothing of the ravines so close to the road. I would have believed the enemy was retreating had not the Canadians and regulars remained to hold the road against us.

While I was reloading Mr. Gordon, of the engineers, came up and was the first of the regulars to behold the enemy. It seemed to be a most foolhardy thing for two hundred Frenchmen to dispute the Du Quesne road against our proud army. I began to realize we were in for something more than a skirmish when a heavy fire was opened on us from ahead and from both sides. Round Paw and I hugged the ground and retired to the right.

A terrific howling and yelling was started by the savages, a sinister chorus that encompassed the road for some distance. Gage's troops seemed to be confused by the fiendish clamor and the invisibility of the foe. The men staggered under the cruel fire, then rallied and began emptying their muskets in volleys. But there was nothing to shoot at except the slim French force ahead. Before they could fall back from the jaws of the trap St. Clair's working force came up on the run to pile confusion on confusion. Gage felt the reinforcements behind him and ordered his men to charge straight ahead and eliminate the Frenchmen. The head of his column was speedily wiped out, and the rest were sadly staggered by the fierce fire.

A gun was rushed up to support the pioneers, and at the third discharge of the piece Beaujeu fell dead, dying gallantly as became a Chevalier of St. Louis. Captain Dumas took his place and for a while the fighting was stubbornly maintained by both sides, with neither, apparently, securing any distinct advantage, but with the

English sustaining heavy punishment. General Braddock persisted in sending heavy masses of men up the road, whereas he should have fallen back until he could have cleared the woods on both sides of the road.

During this portion of the fight the Onondaga and I shifted about and took turns firing, and taking care that one of our rifles should be loaded at all times. On three different occasions we were charged by small bands of savages, but the second unexpected shot from behind the same tree always spoiled the attack and sent the red man back to where the killing was easier.

Then Braddock's mechanical discipline began to give ground before the marksmanship of the enemy. We sealed our fate by remaining between the two ravines. Braddock, furious almost to the point of incoherency, pushed Burton forward with the vanguard, thus making the congestion worse; for the road was but twelve feet wide.

Burton formed his troops under a most galling fire and had just finished the difficult maneuver when Gage's forces fell back rapidly to form behind him.

Then occurred the definite shift in our faring. We had been sustaining terrible punishment, but we had the superiority of numbers to permit heavy losses. But now the two regiments became badly mixed and stumbled about in the smoke-filled road like sheep. There was smoke everywhere. The woods were choked with it, the road was blotted out at times by it. Sheets of fire rippled along the very edges of the narrow way. The two regimental colors were advanced in opposite directions. The officers were being picked off at an alarming rate, and the regulars had not been taught self-dependence.

Some of the enemy's guns were thrust from the foliage into the very faces of the victims. There were many soldiers in that battle who did not see an Indian. Down the line they were delivering their fire at two hundred yards, thereby throwing it away. With the ancient forest closely hemming in the road, with no foe visible, the army was as helpless as a blind man.

It has been repeatedly charged against Braddock that he had no flankers out on the Wednesday afternoon of July ninth. Such statements are untrue. Only, the flankers were shot down by the haphazard volleys of our own artillery. How many Englishmen and provincials England killed that day will never be known, but the French and their allies accounted for only a portion of our dead and wounded.

As Round Paw and I fell back through the woods on the right of the road and risked death at every step from the fire of our own men I caught a glimpse of General Braddock. His horse was down and he was striking a man with the flat of his sword to drive him from the shelter of a tree where the fellow had very sensibly taken refuge. The man returned to the middle of the road and fell dead.

Major Washington came up on horseback as an aide supplied the commander with a fresh mount. Washington was urging something very forcibly and Braddock, mad from humiliation, was as energetically refusing. Later I was to learn that the Virginian was demanding that the men be permitted to find shelter and fight the foe in Indian fashion. But such harum-scarum methods had never been taught in Europe, and the commander roundly refused to listen.

Sir Peter Halket, who with four hundred men, was guarding the baggage-train, also made the same request, but Braddock was deaf. Again in the saddle the commander cursed and beat the men who had brains enough to hide behind trees, and drove them back into the road.

Through the smoke and the thick growth burst a man I recognized as Captain Waggoner, of the Virginia rangers. Behind him streamed eighty men, all excellent rifle shots. They had had enough of the road and were seeking shelter. The Onondaga and I fell in at the captain's side. He did not attempt to make his voice heard above the infernal din but pointed ahead to where a low hill showed through a break in the growth. On the brow of this elevation was a fallen tree that must have measured a full five feet in diameter. Once behind that Waggoner's riflemen could have cleared that side of the woods of the enemy and then could have executed a turning movement that would have driven the savages from the second ravine. We lost three men by the enemy by gaining the hill; and then the crazy mob in the road poured a volley into our rear that killed fifty men!

A few remained on the hill for safety's sake. The rest took their luck below in the woods, striving to keep on the outskirts of the enemy's line. The Onondaga and I

fell back, fighting from tree to tree and striving to reach the wagon-train. The afternoon was wearing away and from the triumphant howls of the French Indians we knew the army was practically surrounded. The Onondaga, glistening with sweat and ferocious for closer fighting, yelled in my ear—

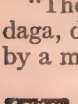
"They say we shall die like brave men!"

I did not desire to be slaughtered, as the uselessly heroic never appealed to me. But the Dinwold girl was cooped up inside the devilish circle and there are certain things a man must always do. She was of my race and I was especially bound to find her. With the Onondaga the case was different. He had a fair chance of winning clear of the terrible mistake, and I urged him to do so. He asked me if I would keep with him, and when I answered that I must find the witch-woman he whooped hoarsely and took the lead in a line that ran parallel to the blood-soaked road.

We heard the drums sound the retreat and knew that Braddock was dead or had lost his haughty pride. We heard the firing down the line as the enemy attacked Halket's men at the baggage-train, and from the lessening volume of the return fire we knew our losses must be tremendous, or else the ammunition was failing.

At the time Braddock ordered the retreat to be sounded only a third of the army was left. We learned that much afterward. The smoke made it impossible to see clearly, and the individual combats between rangers and savages served to confuse further our sense of direction. I remember the Onondaga giving a mighty grunt as he crashed his ax through the head of a Huron who bumped into us. I recall mechanically staving in another red skull with the butt of my loaded rifle. And then to my surprize both the Indian and I were in the road, surrounded by the dead and dying, and those who fired blindly, and more often killed a friend than they wounded a foe.

"These men are fools!" cried the Onondaga, dodging a blow from a musket swung by a madman. "The woods! The woods!"



BUT now we were in the road it was most difficult to leave it without being shot in the back; yet to remain in the frenzied crowd meant death without a chance to strike back. We were only a short distance above the baggage-train, and toward it we began making our way. Guns were spurting flame from the bushes at our feet. The guards were pointing their muskets high and firing thin volleys into the foliage. Once the retreat was sounded a panic had seized upon the survivors, and in a stumbling, insane rush those who could walk made a last attempt to reach the river.

The howling of the Indians increased in volume as they realized the extent of their unexpected triumph. A few hours back the fort Indians had flatly refused to follow Beaujeu, and now they were lusting like demons to kill, kill, until not an Englishman was left alive. The savages, observing the mad fear now possessing the army, grew bolder and began to appear from behind the great trees, from under the grape and pea-vines, and through the tall grass. Gory hands darted out to seize some dead or dying man and drag him into the cover. The best equipped and proudest army England had ever sent to North America was a rabble of crazy men.

Captain Orme of the regulars, and Captain Stewart of the Virginia riflemen aided by another American officer I did not know, came through the mass bearing a heavy figure. It was General Braddock and he was puffing for breath and was wounded through the chest.

"Braddock's killed! Braddock's killed!" was the despairing cry raised as the commander was carried to the rear.

"Rally the fools at the ford," gasped the commander.

"Braddock's killed!" howled a drill sergeant, although he must have heard his general speak.

And he danced up and down until red hands shot out from the bushes and caught him by the ankles and jerked him from our sight.

Major Washington now had all the riflemen fighting in the Indian fashion, and only this maneuver saved the army from being annihilated. Could Braddock have been wounded earlier in the battle Washington and Halket might have prevented a rout. As it was, four hundred and fifty officers and men were dead, slain outright, and nearly as many more wounded. Out of eighty-nine commissioned officers sixty-three were killed or wounded; and not a field-officer had escaped unhurt. Lean

Virginians from behind trees were shouting encouragement to each other and calling for the regulars to fall back out of the way and cross the river. It was the first time our riflemen and England's carefully-drilled regulars had gone into battle together, and already the colonials were discovering they were better men for forest fighting.

With the shattered army in a wild rout the Onondaga and I fell back to the wagons where I had left the girl. I stepped over a man dying from arrow wounds and would have left him had I not recognized him as Busby, my old playmate. This was a sorry ending of all our boyish dreams, when we played at Indian fighting and always emerged the victors! For love of the old days I caught him around the shoulders and yelled for the Onondaga to pick him up by the heels. The Indian had no desire to interrupt his fighting by helping one as good as dead. Yet he would not leave me and he did as I directed and we managed to get Busby to the first wagon.

Busby stared at me vacantly at first, then knew me, and tried to pull me down to him. I kneeled and he faintly whispered:

"What —— fools we've been, Web. Tell Joe I'm sorry."

It was his last effort, and he was dead when I straightened up. The savages were now assaulting the wagons from both sides. We fought our way through the terribly unequal mêlée. It did look as if not a man would survive the day unless it be some of those who had taken to trees outside the road, or who had cut the horses loose from the wagons and had fled at the beginning of the battle. Dunbar the Tardy was still in the rear. It was just as well. The more men crowding into the road simply meant more victims.

"This way, Brond! Brown-hair's here!" howled a voice in my ear.

Cromit was speaking. His mouth was fixed in a ghastly grin, his eyes set and staring. He was bleeding from a wound in the head.

"This is a severe wring," he shouted, and fired a soldier's musket at a painted face showing at the side of a tree.

Then with a screech that sounded above the groans and shrieks of the wounded and the yells of the savages he dived into the bushes. The next moment he staggered back into the road, with a knife buried in his breast, and yet dragging after him a stalwart Ottawa he had clutched by the throat. The two fell at our feet, and with a final effort Cromit tore the red throat open; and so the two died and went among the ghosts.

Dan Morgan was down and the witch-girl was standing over him, an ax in one hand, her pistol in the other.

"Get out of here! Go to the river!" I cried to her.

"Can't leave him," she panted. "Kiss me, mister!"

I kissed her, believing it was very close to the last act in my life. And I pitied her as I had never pitied any one in my life. Morgan got up on his knees. He had been shot through the back of the neck, the ball passing through his mouth and taking several teeth with it. He gained his feet and pushed the girl toward us.

"Must git hoss!" he told me as I seized the girl and began working my way along the wagons. Many of the drivers already were in flight, each to announce himself to be the only survivor of the massacre, and I despaired of securing an animal for the girl.

Morgan went ahead; after the girl came the Onondaga and myself. Round Paw endeavored to shield her from the cross fire of the hidden savages. He reeled, then raised his war-whoop and swung his ax, and I saw the white paw on the chest was turning crimson.

A wounded Potawatomi, rolled from the bushes like a dying snake and coiled about his legs in an attempt to trip him and bring him to the ground. Round Paw quieted him with a swing of the ax and shouted:

"Yo-hah! It is good. They say two very brave men will soon die! Yo-hah!" Then in a mighty voice he told the concealed foe:

"I am a man of the Wolf clan. My teeth are sharp. Ho! Ho! Come out and help a brave man die like a chief."

He would have penetrated the cover in search of a worthy antagonist had I not forcibly restrained him. Dead men, dying men, crazy men; and the last were the worst of all. We ran almost as much risk from our own soldiers as we did from the fort Indians. Especially was this true concerning the Onondaga. Morgan was keeping his feet bravely and the girl was

willingly accompanying him, and even helping him, so long as her backward glances told her the Onondaga and I were following. But did we pause to meet a rush from the woods, then did she hold back and attempt to gain my side.

With a hoarse cry Morgan seized a horse by the nose as the frightened animal burst through the bushes and into the road. Other hands tried to appropriate the prize, but I brushed them back and tossed the girl on to the back of the crazed brute. Morgan motioned for me to mount.

"Take her out of this! For God's sake lose no time!" I cried.

"She sorter seems to like you—" he began, but I lifted him up and placed him behind her and struck the horse on the flank with my rifle-barrel.

I knew she cried out although I could not hear what she said. She made to dismount, but young Morgan passed an arm around her slim waist, and the horse plunged down the road toward the ford. But I shall never forget the expression of her small face as she stared helplessly back at me and the Onondaga.

During this brief bit of action the Indian had been wounded again, this time in the head. We fell back, shoulder to shoulder. An arrow whipped into my arm and the Onondaga broke off the quivering shaft. Arrow or bullet raked my forehead and threatened to fill my eyes with blood had I not snatched a neck-cloth from a dead man's neck and improvised a bandage.

THE savages were now overrunning the first division of wagons, succumbing to their lust for plunder. Only this avariciousness saved those in the road below the wagons from being exterminated. As it was fifty of the Indians pursued us to the Monongahela and killed almost at every step. The regulars had thrown away arms, accouterments and clothing and, when overtaken, died stupidly like oxen.

The curt crack of the rifles on each side of the road marked the cool retreat of our provincials. They were fighting steadily and composedly, and their resistance discouraged a final onslaught that might have cost the life of every Englishman on the fort side of the river. We were within a few rods of the river, which was filled with frantic fugitives, when five of the pursuing savages closed in on Round Paw and me. I had the barrel of my rifle left and my ax. One man went down beneath the barrel. I slipped and fell on him. A knife stabbed through the calf of my left leg, but the man under me was dead.

"Yo-hah! Tell his ghost I sent you!" yelled the Onondaga, and my assailant fell dead across me.

I got to my feet and beheld the Onondaga in the clutches of two savages, the fifth having passed on to overtake other victims. Before I could lend a hand one of my friend's assailants, an Ottawa, choked and went limp with Round Paw's knife through his throat.

"They say a brave man of the Wolf clan of the Onondagas will soon die!" panted Round Paw, and he essayed to sound his war-whoop as he and the remaining savage wound their arms about each other and fell.

I pawed them apart and raised my ax, but the French Indian was dying by the time I could yank him clear of my friend. He was a Mingo, one of the Senecas who had preferred the Ohio to the Genesee.

"A brave man has killed me," he faintly said.

The Onondaga propped himself up on one elbow and feebly waved his ax, but his voice rang out so strong I did not believe he was seriously hurt. He proudly proclaimed:

"Yo-hah! A good fight! This man did me a very great honor. He fought well. But the Wolf has strong, sharp teeth—*Ha-hum-weh — Ha-hum-weh — Ha-hum-weh*——"

And he dropped dead across the body of the dead man who had killed him.

I entered the river above the ford to escape the crowd of fugitives, some of whom were drowned in their mad haste to make the crossing. Busby, Cromit, and Round Paw had paid the price of a stubborn man's ignorance. Of all those who would never return from the fatal errand I would miss the Onondaga the most; and after him Cromit of the mighty hands. And there was another ache in my heart as I visioned the fair Josephine, waiting in old Alexandria for her lover to return. Out of twenty-nine gallant men to ride from the old town only four were to go back.

Even while climbing the opposite bank,

and as I staggered through the wreckage of the army in search of the Dinwold girl, I was seeing another picture—that of the brave showing the army had made when it marched from Alexandria. All that was left was a horde of fugitives. Behind us were our guns, our wagon-train, our military chest and its twenty-five thousand pounds in specie, our dead—and infinitely worst of all there was our wounded and those captured unhurt!

There was no pursuit beyond the ford, although only weariness, or their love of plunder, prevented them from killing us for many a long mile. Later the colonies learned that Dunbar's retreat was unexpected and the French hastened back to the fort, still believing they would be attacked. Those who had fled on horses were well on their way to the first crossing, or far beyond it.

I quit the rabble of weeping, cursing, and groaning men and took to the woods; for my wounds were weakening me and I did not propose to die in the open and have my scalp paraded at Du Quesne. I must have grown light of head, for only in spots can I recall my wanderings. I have a picture of dusky woods and a rivulet, where I paused to drink repeatedly and wash my wounds. I remember being in the middle of a wide stream with the stars showing; but I have no recollection of entering or leaving the water. I remember the morning light and my vague surprize at finding a bandage about my leg, also that my arm throbbed and pained me and the miraculous appearance of a bandage of cool leaves. I have no recollection whatever of fearing the Indians, or of trying to avoid them.

I suppose it was the evening of that same day that I came to a stumbling halt at the edge of an opening and stared across a large cleared space. The spot was familiar, and with a shock I suddenly discovered it was on the Allegheny and about half a mile above Du Quesne. I did not lose my wits again. From that moment on my memory is painful exact.

Savages were singing and dancing around some stakes. I counted twelve of the stakes, and to each was fastened an inert, charred figure. From the red coats and other trophies being displayed I knew the dead men had been regulars and that they had died by torture. I was glad they were through with all and were beyond all further misery.

I must have been very weak when I came to my senses on the edge of the clearing, for I could not have tasted food during my blind wanderings. The shock of the twelve stakes, however, gave me something that answered for physical strength, and I fell back rapidly from the dangerous neighborhood.

Something had led me back to the second crossing of the Monongahela, the stream I recall being in the middle of, but not of entering or leaving. What had kept me from following the fort road and walking into Du Quesne will be differently explained by different men—the Onondaga would have said it was my *orenda*.

There were no Indians abroad in the forest, for none was willing to miss the feasting and drinking and torture, let alone the distribution of the rich booty. Moving painfully and without sighting any human being I came to the rough country at the head of Turtle Creek and forded and gained the army's camp on Rush Creek. It did not seem possible that seventy-odd hours before Braddock's army had halted here. That was far back among the old things, as the Indians would have expressed it.

Then by slow stages I followed the Braddock road back to the Great Meadows. All along the road were muskets and accouterments, discarded by those who had passed over the road ahead of me; and there was no need to be saving of powder and lead.

It did seem as if all the buzzards in North America had come to Western Pennsylvania, and never have I seen bears so plentiful. There is a story based on the Monongahela battle to the effect that the bears grew to have a contempt for human beings after eating the dead of Braddock's army. I never placed credence in the story, but I can vouch that the brutes were not easily frightened by my approach. I shot several but depended upon rabbits, turkeys, and a deer for food. More than once I had to fight my nerves before I could approach a huddled form in the road ahead, fearing it might be the girl.

Just beyond the Meadows I came upon three men cooking deer-meat over a little fire. They were wild-looking creatures and at my approach sprang up and snatched for their guns.

"Simon Flax, don't you know me?" I called out after recognizing my old acquaintance.

"Aye, I know you, Black Brond. I know you for the man who said we would whip the French, —— you. We are poor backwoodsmen, trying to git back to our families before the Injuns catch and burn 'em. Curse you and your talk about that stupid pig of a Braddock, who would not let his men make the best fight there was in them! We have no truck with you. When the ax and torch are carried behind the Laurel Hill you'll be satisfied, I opine."

There was nothing I could answer to such monstrous injustice. I bowed my head and passed on, the three pairs of eyes watching me balefully. I had not asked their aid, nor did I need it. But I did hunger for companionship. I turned and called back:

"Have any of you seen a wagoner on a horse, Dan Morgan by name? And was he riding double with a fellow younger than he?"

"—— take your man Morgan and t'other feller!" cried the bowl-maker. "Git out of sight afore I lose my patience. I promised my younkers a French sculp. By the Eternal! Your hair might do just as well! Fat crops in and growing, and now we must quit 'em and fort ourselves. Curse the day we ever heard the name of Braddock."

"We'll do our own fighting in our own way next time," bawled one of the other men.

His words fell idly on my ears yet I was to live to recall them, and to realize the fellow had unwittingly uttered the one great truth that the battle of the Monongahela taught us—self-dependence. From the beginning of the colonies we had relied on England, and now that the best she could give us for our protection had miserably failed we were to learn self-reliance, and the few long rifles that allowed a fragment of the army to escape across the second ford were in my day to increase to thousands. But that knowledge was all ahead of me; and disheartened at not finding some trace of Morgan and the Dinwold girl I left the sullen trio and continued my weary journey.

CHAPTER X

THE LONG TRAIL ENDS

IT WAS thirteen days after the battle that Dunbar the Tardy arrived at Fort Cumberland on Will's Creek with three hundred wounded soldiers. It is impossible to picture the amazement and consternation that smothered the colonies when it was definitely known that the army had been defeated and broken. There had been no concern in the public mind as to the outcome of the campaign.

So complete was our assurance that citizens of Philadelphia and other towns circulated subscription papers and solicited funds for a fitting celebration over the coming victory. Huge bonfires were heaped up, the kindling torch waiting upon the word hourly expected. When Benjamin Franklin advised that the common exuberance be held in check until the truth was known he was laughed at for being a kill-joy. When Governor Morris informed the Assembly that the French had won he was vigorously insulted and told that Braddock could not have lost the battle.

The first uncertain news was received by Colonel James Innes, commander at Fort Cumberland. This was on July eleventh, two days after the battle. He immediately started expresses to the neighboring provinces to announce his grave fear that the army had met with reverses. While these messengers were carrying the astounding news the wagoners, who had first fled the bloody field, were beginning to reach the outlying settlements. Governor Morris was at Carlisle when a half-starved, half-mad wagoner flogged his exhausted mount into the settlement and began crying out that Braddock had been defeated, that the entire army had been annihilated, and that he, the wagoner, was the only survivor.

The disaster was so complete, according to this fellow's story, that many refused to believe any of it, and declared him to be a deserter who was trying to save his skin with ridiculous lies. But the wretched fact was soon established when one of Braddock's own messengers arrived with a fairly accurate account of the affair. This man also brought the intelligence that General Braddock was wounded. He carried a written message which he had been instructed to read at every hostel; and by degrees the people began to realize that something terrible had happened on the Monongahela.

The provinces were stunned. On the sixteenth another messenger brought further details. General Braddock was dead and had been buried at Great Meadows on the fourteenth, and the army and Dunbar's

wagons had passed over his grave to hide it from the savages. On the day this man brought his dismal budget Governor Morris sent out a call for the Assembly to meet with him in Philadelphia on the twenty-third, so as to permit Dunbar to take the offensive and prevent the triumphant enemy from overrunning our frontiers and from bringing the ax to the eastern settlements.

Dunbar promptly announced his determination to be done with forest fighting; and he marched his twelve hundred soldiers to Philadelphia and left three hundred wounded men at Will's Creek. His army went into camp on Society Hill, and in vain did Governor Morris urge him to send a few men to patrol the Susquehanna. Enough refugees came in to swell the army to fifteen hundred, and without raising his hand to protect the border Dunbar the Tardy sailed with this force for New York in October.

Stupefaction was replaced by dismay as this, the only fighting force in the south, was withdrawn. In very truth were the colonies aroused to the realization that they must protect themselves by doing their own fighting, and no longer depend upon overseas armies. Once Dunbar's intentions to withdraw from the province became known Governor Dinwiddie urged Pennsylvania and Maryland to unite with Virginia in building a strong fort at the Great Crossing or on Great Meadows. This wise plan for protecting the border came to nothing because of the colonies' inability to overcome factional jealousies and to agree as to the division of the expense, labor, and the like. So we drifted into three years of rapine and slaughter.

I reached Carlisle the day after Governor Morris started for Philadelphia. My wounds, aggravated by exposure, forced me to travel slowly; and my efforts to find some trace of the Dinwold girl permitted many survivors to pass me. Mine was old news when I did arrive. In Carlisle I fell in with three rangers who were cut off from the ford when the final rout filled the narrow road. They were forced to advance north, or close to Du Quesne, to escape the savages. They had concealed themselves in the woods near the Allegheny, and from what they had observed I learned how five hundred of Pontiac's Ottawas had quarreled with the French over the division of the booty, and had thrown back the ax and had killed and scalped two Frenchmen very close to the spot where my informants were hiding.

I recovered from my wounds and became active in preparing a defense against the red swarms we knew would soon be upon us. As rapidly as possible a string of forts was built from the Delaware and Susquehanna to the Potomac. There was Fort Bedford at Rea's Town, Fort Ligonia on the site of the old Indian town of Loyal Hanna in Westmoreland County, Fort Loudon at the foot of Blue Mountain, Fort Lowther at Carlisle and Chambers' Fort a few miles west of that town.

And there were other forts, as well as numerous small block-houses, erected during the next three years. For two months after the battle of the Monongahela we worked feverishly, taking advantage of the brief period the Indians required to convince themselves that the war-path to the east was unobstructed. Then the storm began to break.

The first blow struck by the raiders was in Cumberland County, and soon the ax was taking toll on the Susquehanna. A large body of Indians camped thirty miles above Harris Ferry and killed on both sides of the river. In October a mixed force of French and Indians was burning and scalping within forty miles of the Ferry. Settlers were frantically fleeing to the east, or doggedly forting themselves on learning that escape was cut off. I went out with forty-five men from the Ferry and helped bury fourteen mangled bodies. Great Cove was destroyed.

By December the Indians were on the Lehigh behind the Blue Mountains, where they killed a hundred people and burned many cabins. Bethlehem prepared to resist an attack. At about the same time another band penetrated to the Schuylkill in Berks County and did devil's work. For fifty miles around Easton the country was devastated. So widespread were the activities of the savages that hundreds of people fled into the Jerseys, some carrying their household goods and driving their cattle; others vainly offering half of all they possessed in an effort to save something.

It was a characteristic of this unequal fighting that the Indians took but few prisoners. Thirty-six houses and the church at Gnadenhutten were burned, although Lieutenant Brown and a company of rangers forted themselves in the church and held

it until it was fired. The Juniata was visited early in January and many people were murdered within two or three miles of Fort Patterson.

Even the back districts of Chester and Philadelphia counties were endangered, and four hundred German farmers from the latter county marched into Philadelphia city and demanded that the Assembly grant them some protection. These settlers should have remembered how men of their race defeated Joseph Seely, Berks County candidate for sheriff, in the October election, because he favored military training.

Throughout the Winter the savages continued very active, which was unusual, as during the snow months the frontier always had experienced a relief from attacks and had slept soundly. The woods from the Juniata to Shamokin were filled with ferocious red men, who killed and burned. In the latter part of the month a hundred Indians at Kittanning, including not a few who had been loyal to England until the defeat on the Monongahela, left to raid the Coocoocheague settlements and forts Shirley and Littleton. I was one of those who rode ahead to spread the alarm, and I experienced enough thrills to last me several lifetimes.

And so the bloody story might go on through volumes. Settlements in flames and the rough roads crowded with terrified families. Scarcely a night could one scan the horizons and not see the red flares that told of some cabin or hamlet being wiped out. Not until General John Forbes' expedition in the Summer of 1758, when he marched to Du Quesne with fifty-eight hundred men and a thousand wagons, did we begin to have a rest from the butcheries. But General Forbes would have nothing to do with the ill-fated Braddock road and wisely followed the central path through Carlisle, Shippensburg, and over Laurel Mountain. The long rifles were proving their worth and were soon to take Canada from the French.

DURING all this strife and these miserable scenes I endeavored to do my share in exacting a penalty from the red men. For two weeks I worked with Captain Jack, the Black Hunter of the Juniata. But when that river was harried he became such a madman and would take such foolhardy risks that I left his band. Yet we made some rare killings in the short time we were together.

The danger was never so great, however, as to cause me to forget the Dinwold girl. In my dreams and in my waking hours I could see her tugging at young Morgan's hand and striving to come back and face the trouble out in my company. At night I would awake with her voice in my ears, calling me "mister." Once I dreamed we were with the baggage train and she was saying "Kiss me." It required many a bloody foray against Shawnee and traitorous Delaware to wash that last dream thin. So there was never a day, when I was meeting with some one new, that I did not make diligent inquiry for her.

But so many families had been exterminated, so many pedigrees ended, that only by chance could I hope for news from the witch-girl. An elfish, boyish creature in reality, but my separation from her translated her into some symbol of the border, something fearfully desirable. It became a mania with me to find her, and yet my place was on the frontier.

On relief sallies, on retreats, and on scouting-trips, I asked of all I met if they knew of one called Daniel Morgan. Some professed to have met him, but none knew about a young woman dressed as a man. At the end of my service with General Forbes I was as ignorant as to whether she be alive or dead as I had been when I recovered my wits at the edge of the clearing along the Allegheny, where the dead hung from the twelve torture-stakes.

And I missed the Onondaga. God only knows how I missed him and his brave heart when on some lonely faring. I missed Cromit in a lesser degree, and often wished his terrible hands could help me decide some uneven argument. Aye, I missed them. But it was Round Paw of the Wolf clan whose absence ate into my soul. Red or white, never was there a stronger comrade than he. The lonely Monongahela sings his requiem, but in my heart he shall ever have a high place. Many a good comrade have I had in my day, but none so dear to my memory as the Wolf man. Gone to meet his particular god as has many another, and all because one man did not understand.

Worn by incessant hardships and seriously troubled by the old arrow wound in my arm I returned to Carlisle, uncertain

as to what I should do next. The settlers were preparing to follow General Forbes' army and make a new beginning along some pleasant stream. But I, the last of the House of the Open Hand, had no desire to build a cabin and take root in one spot. The strange unrest, which had been only satisfied by the turmoil of border warfare, reduced me to a sad state of nerves. How could I ever be content on one creek, or in one valley, with the memories of the Monongahela haunting me? With the vision of that small wistful face staring back at me I rode a skeleton of a horse into Carlisle.

Perhaps it was a weakness of spirit that impelled me to surrender to the sudden longing to visit my old home and once more look through the gate of my father's garden. I scarcely remember my mother, but perhaps this longing was the divine calling of the maternal in me, like my horse, scarcely more than a skeleton. I borrowed a suitable horse of a stranger and did not marvel at his trust in me. At times I assured myself it was but a whim, that I would soon be doubling on my tracks and seeking service in the north; and yet I rode on.

The memories stirred up by the journey were painful. Unlike that other visit the Onondaga was no longer my companion; and yet at times I fancied he walked at my stirrup, his chest showing the fresh white paint of the round paw of the wolf. In my more rational moments I felt old and out of place. It was when I brooded over the witch-girl's disappearance that I felt a great emptiness of heart which made all the plans of youth but little account. I had no wish to look on Josephine again and tell her poor Busby's farewell message; and yet something drew me to the town.

I followed the roundabout Susquehanna road and passed by the ruins of many a cabin. It was not the most direct route, but it pleased me to fool myself with the thought I would never continue as far as Alexandria. However, I did persevere, and an astounding thing happened to me and expelled my apathy and left me quivering with a new purpose. The Onondaga would have said it was my *orenda* working for me. A white man would have said it was luck. It all happened at a hamlet on the Maryland line where a dozen men were listening to a rugged fellow's plea for volunteers to serve as riflemen in the expedition soon to be made against Canada. Weary of war, weary of myself, and finding solace only in my strange dreams, I would have passed by with deaf ears had not his rude eloquence compelled my attention while he cried out:

"Sick of it? Who ain't sick of it? But how will it be stopped unless your rifles help stop it? I tell you we've got 'em running now. You've had a bellyful of fighting? Who ain't? I thought I had a bellyful at Braddock's battle. I've thought I had more'n enough during the last three years. But I've been larning all these years; larning that if we want a job well done we must do it ourselves. Men, it's the long rifle, and not the Brown Bess what's going to put a stop to the Injun deviltries. And if you'll go along with me I'll lead only as long as I can keep ahead. When any other feller can lead faster he takes my place and I take his orders."

I reined in and stared at the fellow closely. There was something reminiscent in the strong young face. He was quick to see me and my travel-stained forest garb, and he called out over the heads of his audience:

"Welcome, friend. You look like you was used to woods fighting."

"I've had my share of it; from Braddock down to Forbes and much in between."

"But you're not through yet? Your long rifle still shoots?"

"It still shoots. I am not through until the job is finished."

He pointed me out as a wholesome example, and embarrassed me by extolling my high spirit. Whereas I was sick of Indians, sick of hardships. I had but one desire; to spread my blanket back of the Carlisle House and close to the sleepy *lap-lap* of the Potomac and rest there one night, and perchance dream of Busby and other playmates. I backed my horse away and waited until the young man had finished his talk and had secured half a dozen names or marks on his muster-roll. Then I dismounted and joined him and drew him aside, and said—

"You'll be Daniel Morgan, at one time a wagoner in Braddock's army."

"Dead center. But I don't know you from Adam, friend. You have mighty little meat on your bones."

"I threw you on to a horse at the lower ford of the Monongahela on July ninth, three years ago."

"——! I remember. The man fighting beside the tall Injun!"

"There was a young person with you——"

"A gal in breeches. Elsie Dinwold, she gave her name. She had the grit of any man I ever see."

"Had?" I repeated, a deathly faintness stealing through my gaunt frame.

"And still has, I'll guarantee, if she's kept out of danger and didn't git sculped. Lord! But she did try desperate hard to git off that hoss and git back to the fighting!"

"Man, where is she? Where did you leave her? Why don't you say something when you talk?" I cried.

And I placed my hands on his shoulders and shook him.

He grinned broadly and showed no resentment at my manners.

"Where she is I can not say. But she went to Alexandria. I gathered from her talk—and she talked mighty little—that some one she used to know, and liked a heap, lived there once. But you'll be signing up as a rifleman for northern work?"

I mounted before bothering to answer him. Then I called back:

"That must come later. I must finish a journey first."

And though it was dark and my horse was weary I rode on.

A SKELETON of a man on a worn-out horse. No leisurely riding now. I would not have eaten, nor slept, if not for my mount. I had but one desire—to strike into the old post-road and finish the distance at a smashing gallop. The poor brute was badly used up when I did leave Shooter's Hill behind me. I reined in.

Now that I had arrived and would soon know all, I experienced a strange timidity. Three years had passed. No soldiers now enlivened Alexandria; and I knew the drowsy calm of the town would never suit her. She had gone away long before this; or—and this was a most disturbing thought—she had found some one who appreciated her, and had married. Beyond all doubt she had come to the belief that I was dead.

Now that I had talked with young Morgan I could not forgive my stupendous folly in neglecting to seek her on the banks of the Potomac. Yet I had reasoned logically enough—she was never one to seek refuge in Alexandria. She was born of the frontier and border blood was in her veins. She would feel as much out of place in Alexandria as the fair Josephine would feel on the lonely shore of the Monongahela.

I clucked to my horse and I rode down the King's Road, and the dust scuffed up by my tired mount's feet lazily drifted on to the meadow grass and settled and spoiled its sheen; just as it had when I watched the grenadiers march up the same road on Braddock's fatal business.

The town had changed none. There were the same slim and fat chimneys, the same quaint roofs of different patterns, and the double row of Lombardy poplars before the Carlisle House. There were the windows of the blue-and-white room, where Braddock had drank his wine and berated the colonies for their lack of zeal. The new warehouse on Point Lumley, at the foot of Duke Street, was complete and already showing the mellow influence of the weather. On the wharf were several guns, brought over by Braddock and left behind because of their cumbersome weight. But no gay uniforms decorated the approach to the Royal George and Gadsby's; no guards awed the natives by their precise maneuvers in the market-place.

I dismounted to be less conspicuous, and with my long rifle under my arm led my patient animal to the House of the Open Hand. And here I received a sharp surprize. The garden beyond the gate was trim and orderly. The fountain was cleaned out, and the yellow-topped mustard was destroyed. The roof of the grape arbor had been repaired; and the grounds reflected the tidy content my father had so dearly loved. The place was inhabited.

I turned away, feeling greatly depressed. Now I knew I had come on a fool's errand. The witch-girl—a bit of thistle-down before the wind—had drifted on. I had no heart to see the front of the house, and would have returned to the market-place to bait my mount and ride away had not a woman emerged from the door to stare at me for a second. I was for hurrying on, but she called me by name and came running after me as fast as her flounces and petticoats would permit.

"I knew you! I knew you, Webster Brond! Your tall figure would betray you anywhere!" she cried, extending both hands.

"Josephine!" I mumbled.

"Mistress Hewitt, wife of Carter Hewitt,"

she corrected, and relinquishing my hands to drop me a courtesy. "You must come in and tell me where you have been and what you have been doing. Mr. Hewitt will be back any time now. He rode to Annapolis."

So poor Busby's message would never be delivered. Relieved of that sad errand there was no call for me to tarry. I mumbled something about being in a desperate hurry, but she seemed to be possessed even to the point of unwomanliness. For she fairly danced before me, her blue eyes sparkling with mischief; and she insisted:

"You must come in, *mister*. You just must."

"Why do you speak like that?" I whispered. "Why do you call me 'mister'?"

And I grasped her hands and gripped them till her grimace reminded me I was not handling a red savage.

"No; I'll tell you nothing out here in the road," she cried. "A vestryman will be rebuking us. Besides, it's not comely that you should hold my hands. Come!"

I released her, and followed her under the grinning mask and through the cool doorway. In the hall I halted and cautiously seated myself in a spindle-legged chair, and demanded—

"Now tell me."

"Oh, Webster, it would be so romantic if you weren't so stupidly matter-of-fact. Why shouldn't I call you 'mister'?"

"Josephine, the devil's in you. Have you anything to say, or not?"

I rose as if to leave.

With a sigh at having her game cut short she primly began:

"I have a young ward, a refugee from the Braddock rout. She came here in a most scandalous condition—dressed as a man! She gave your name and said you would come to find her. She gave me your name, but she always speaks of you as 'mister.' How is that for mighty respect?"

"And now? Where is she?" I muttered.

"Why, now she should be in the garden, gathering posies for the table. You see Mr. Hewitt bought this place three days after Braddock and poor Busby marched away. He was a confirmed bachelor. He lived here alone until our marriage a year ago this Summer. Mistress Elsie from the beginning would come here to walk in the garden because it had been your home. It promised a rare scandal. Mr. Hewitt appealed to me in great alarm. I had to marry the poor man, or else banish the wild thing. Now it's perfectly proper for her to walk in the garden as much as she will. I've lost my interest in you, Webster. You know the way down the hall?"

An idiotic question. The door, opening into the garden, was the one I had passed through thousands of times in the old days.

"You've been good to her, Josephine. You must have been mighty good to her, or she would never have stayed," I cried.

"Rubbish! I couldn't have driven her away. She was always looking for 'mister' to come. She would have made a camp in the garden and lived like an Indian." Then with much sadness she added: "I hate that word—Indian. You understand, Webster—I'm sorry."

"His last words, Joe," I blundered, giving her Busby's message after all.

"Go find her," she brokenly whispered. And as I made down the hall I saw her hand traveling up the balustrade, clinging to it tightly to aid her weary feet.

But sorrow was not for me this day. I was selfishly alive with the joy of anticipation. I burst through the doorway as if pursued by Pontiac himself. Next I came to a plunging halt and found myself bowing awkwardly before a dainty creature in flounces and lace.

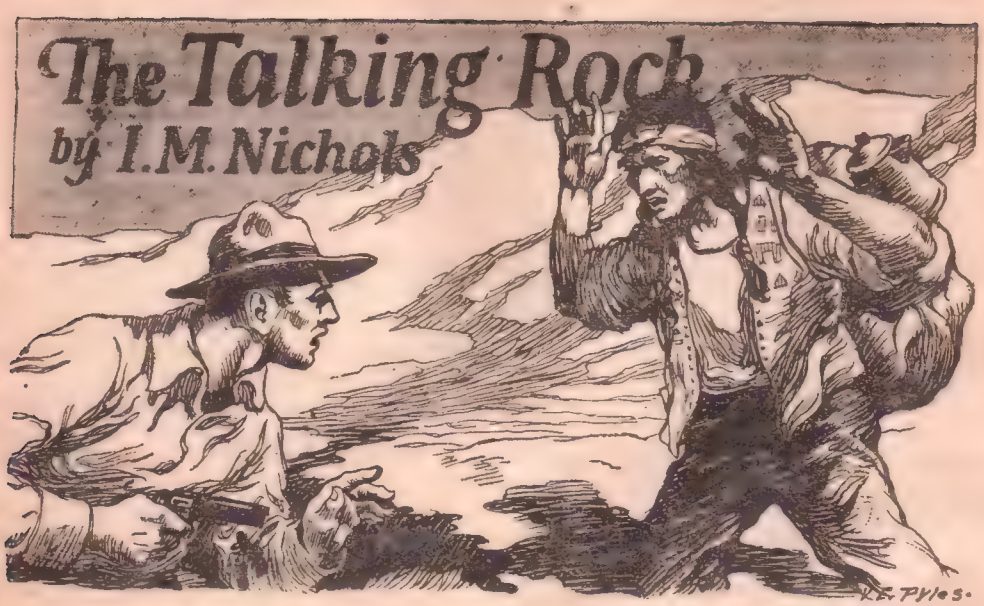
"I beg your pardon," I stammered. "I was looking for a young lady——"

"Oh, mister! You've come back!" she sobbed. And the armful of flowers were dropped and a miracle was worked; for I found the lovely thing in my arms, her voice whimpering over and over: "Oh, mister! You've come back!"

THE END

The Talking Rock

by I. M. Nichols



Author of "The Building of the Dam."

LOUIE BIRD-THAT-FLIES-IN-THE-EVENING had the frame of a Roman gladiator and the disposition of a hyena. There was just enough Indian blood in him to entitle him to endorse his Uncle Sam's oil-lease vouchers, and to warp and twist his soul into the mold of a being half-monster, half-human. The result produced by the mixture of alien bloods in the same vessel is something no chemist has been quite able to account for, but perhaps Louie's career may be better understood when you consider that his lineage was composed on his mother's side of the diverse strains of Micmac, Canuck and Chickasaw and that his father was a white man with an extensive and fascinating jail record.

However, Louie Bird in a dress suit on his Carlisle graduating platform was a sight to remember. One did well to remember it, for that was the last of such appearances for Louie. His return to tribal ways and customs was of the speed of the toboggan and the finality of the smashed egg shell. Yet in some ways Louie, who came to his oil rights by way of the Chickasaw tribe, bore his Carlisle inheritance with as much racial pride as though he had been of pure blood. True, he had slumped to eating with his fingers when by himself, letting his hair grow and never bathing, but his vocabulary was still equal to many of his professors, and to behold Louie in his dirty jeans and priceless beaded vest discussing the Darwinian and other erudite theories with some passing archeologist was to rub one's ears and listen again.

Louie Bird—his natal bird was the bat which flies at eve—fitted better into the lava and sage and mountain landscape of his adopted country than he did on to the flat and monotonous derrick-forested plains of Oklahoma. So he drew his patrimony from the oil fields and flourished and waxed mighty in his evil ways in the country which lies, wide, magnificent and untamed, between the Salmon and the Snake. He was registered at Fort Hall and he called the Blackfeet brothers, and the mystery of a part-blood Chickasaw abiding with the Bannocks and the Blackfeet and drawing oil money from Oklahoma rights is only one of the incidental things which made Louie the attractive personality he was.

If badness has its charm, then Louie was well qualified as a spell-binder. There was a legend concerning him which nobody could, or cared to, pin down to more than a legend. There had been a time in the career of Louie Bird after his return from Carlisle when prospectors who went into the hills with him were later invariably found with their skulls cracked with a twenty-pound sledge, or some such able

"The Talking Rock," copyright, 1923, by I. M. Nichols.

instrument, as they lay in their bunks or slept on the ground.

In each case the technique of the artist was perfect. Nothing ever happened to a partner of Louie's until pay gravel was struck and the claim staked in Louie's name. As a result of this legend, a deep-seated respect toward the Indian had grown up in his native haunts, due to the habit of the West in isolated regions, of minding its own business.

The reckless character of Tarp McNair, marking time before joining the Andrews Asiatic Expedition, may be judged, therefore, by his reply on one occasion, to a request of Louie Bird's.

"So, Skull-cracker, you want me to be your pal in an errand after Indian treasure in the Valley of the Moon, do you?"

There is no doubt that Tarp had been close to death a sufficient number of times to enable him to be sure that this was not his particular hour.

Louie's language in answer was framed with clipped and chiseled formality. It was significant that the angrier the breed was, the more choice and collegiate was his converse.

"Your own training ought to tell you there is every chance of gem deposit in that sort of obsidian flow," responded the Indian.

You observe there was no reference whatever to the appellation McNair had bestowed upon him. But McNair knew, as well as everybody knows, that the way of the red man is to hoard and cherish insults carefully and get even in the end—with one big smash.

The two of them, Tarp McNair and Louie, had just finished on the American Falls Reclamation Project. Not that the project was done by any means, but they were done with it—McNair tired of watching concrete poured and merely killing time anyway, and the Indian because of an unexpected battle with a European laboring gentleman who had surprizingly carried a knife under his left armpit.

McNair and the Indian sat this evening on a piece of form lumber, quite by themselves, smoking and eying the sage flat and the up-tilted stage drop of the Bannock Range to the east, and carrying on their argument.

"In the first place," objected McNair, "what was the idea in having this Talking Rock you tell about so far away from the scene which its carvings portray?"

"Warm Springs, where the rock stands, was the easiest crossing of the Snake, and the common meeting place of the friendly tribes. You understand these carvings I speak of are so old that a large part of their interpretation must be conjecture."

"Your whole scheme sounds to me like the plot of a bum movie," McNair interposed. "Listen. How does the synopsis sound to you? A lava boulder with an Indian map on it telling about a mysterious lava flow with an Indian trail through it and a cave in the middle full of gold nuggets, rubies, sapphires, pottery, feather blankets, mummified Indians, and bronze tools. Why don't you throw in a Rhodesian diamond mine for good luck? As a first-class dream dopester, Louie, you have my deep admiration, but you'd better quit prospecting, hunt up a good producing company and go into the picture business."

But Louie of the mingling bloods had the forbearance of those who conquer in the long run.

"It perhaps does sound absurd—to an Easterner," and the satire and the perfect enunciation, from the lips of the unscrubbed and long-haired Louie was incongruous enough. "But the Valley of the Moon is of well-known authenticity, due to the splendid efforts of the Government surveyors, as well as the man who explored it also, and gave it its name. The existence of the valley is no dream, neither is that of the Talking Rock which stands on the Rim Rock of the Snake a few rods east of the Warm Springs Ferry. You must admit that where there is so much obsidian flow in a lava field, there may be corundum."

"But what would persuade any sensible Indian into a spot like the valley?" persisted McNair.

"You must remember this State has been the stamping-ground of my people for many generations. A retreat like the Valley of the Moon was obviously a natural hiding-place of tribes when pursued by the enemy, because of its rough character and forbidding aspect. When you remember that Yellowstone Park was shunned by the Indians, you can realize how desperate were their plights to voluntarily enter this region, named because of its resemblance to the craters of the moon."

"How do you hook up the Talking Rock with the Valley of the Moon?"

"It takes an Indian to read the signs on the Talking Rock. To the white it says that the rock is nothing but an Indian tracing of the Snake River country. Very well. So it is. But it is more than that. It is a tribal record. Your profession gives you a wide understanding of hieroglyphics. There are many signs on the rock which mean more than the white man thinks. For instance, the Valley of the Moon and its secret treasure are plainly written for the Indian eye."

"And gold? You know very well no Indian ever dug an ounce of gold in his life."

"It is true the Indians had little use for gold, though they must have found quantities of it. It was too heavy for their common use, too soft for tools and never grew to be a standard of exchange with them. But because the white man valued it they were not above caching away their finds when they came upon them in killing raids. They were not willing to dig for it, but they delighted in taking it away from their natural enemies."

"Louie, in two months I am going where there are real ruins, stone tablets with real talk-talk written all over them. How do I know some enterprizing tramp didn't chop out these funnygrams on your rock just to pass a pleasant afternoon? Do you think I am going to waste shoe leather on a simple mud-flow not half as interesting as Kilauea, where she still smokes? And besides, if this is so rich why don't you go by yourself instead of letting me in—how do you know I may not bean you and come back alone with the swag?"

This delicate allusion also passed unnoticed.

"We can enter the Valley either from here or from Minidoka."

"How long will the trip take?"

"Twenty days ought to make it."

"Then just to prove how much in earnest you are, Mr. Bird, you lay down five thousand dollars in gold in my name in the American Falls First National Bank and let her lie till I come back from this little picnic with you!"

McNair blew a funnel of smoke into the clear Idaho evening and looked at his companion slant-wise. Louie Bird may have been slow to wrath, but he was not slow of comprehension. Yet there was no flicker in the evil, brooding eyes, no faintest changing in the carven immobility of the handsome countenance.

"It would appear you do not entirely trust me, Mr. McNair," and McNair fancied he heard in the polished, well inflected voice the twang of unappeased malice, the willingness to wait long that vengeance might be complete.

"To be plain, as between friends, Louie, my trust in you is equal to just five thousand iron berries, planked down in the safe-keeping of that pale-faced cashier over at the bank. If you don't like the proposition, pick out some other idiot to hunt your Golconda. However, as you've given away the secret to me, I'm hardly safe running around loose, though no doubt you thought of that yourself."

"And haven't you any fondness for gold, when it doesn't have to be dug?"

"I'm so fond of it that if we find any in the Valley I'm going to have half of it. A gentlemen's agreement, Louie. And while you have had other prospecting partners and made just as binding agreements with them, perhaps you never made any with quite the back-action kick in it this one has, just in case any accident befalls me up there, such as falling down a crater."

"We shall have to guard against accidents. What time in the morning does your honorable bank open?"

It seemed simple enough. With the five thousand deposited to his credit, after the manner of life insurance and the whole camp apprized of his forth-coming trip with the Indian, McNair felt his usual careless indifference as to his safety. He had been on far more hazardous journeys before, in fiercer company, to wilder lands. The chances were the loot discovered would not come to a tenth of the bond held by the bank on his life.

YET McNair's own feeling of security was not shared by Hennery, the construction boss on the American Falls work. Hennery was of the Scot breed of few words and extensive meditation.

"I presume, Tarp, if you have any relatives, you had better leave word with me where you want the remains sent," commented the Scot, as McNair proceeded

about their cabin making up his pack preparatory to departure.

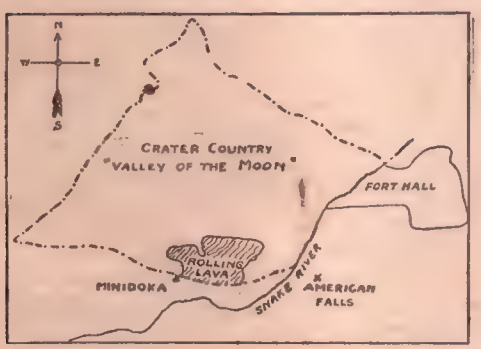
"There ain't going to be any remains, friend. With the ransom on my scalp ready for picking when he gets back, Louie will be harmless as a child."

"But you have injured his feelings and insulted his intelligence. He will take pleasure in recalling both when he gets you out in that place of the left-overs of creation."

"All right, Gloom. In a couple of weeks Hiers with his Curtiss is going to make Pocatello and Boise on his regular passenger-riding stunt. If I don't show up by that time, have him hop over the Minidoka lava country and take a look for my corpse."

"McNair, you are at times that light in the mind I wonder you ever got elected for the position you occupy with the Asiatic."

But whatever lightness of mind McNair possessed was dissipated like morning mist in the moment he first beheld the full



extent of that strange and phantasmal country, the Valley of the Moon. It was evening when he and Louie Bird climbed their first cinder cone and looked into the land of craters. McNair had been in many desolate and forbidding regions, he had seen the Grand Cañon in moonlight and in dawn; he had beheld the living flow of lava in the fields of Mauna Loa; he had breathed the fire and sulfur of Popocatapetl, but for sheer, stark savagery of nature, he knew he saw at last the inner workings of the earth's creation.

On every side of them lifted the volcanic buttes and cones, frozen in the form, they had cooled out on the day of their awful birth. Not a green thing nor a living thing marked the twisted, tortured black expanse of chilled lava. A silence, too weighted with meaning for any accurate interpretation, oppressed the place. It was as if there were still emanations of disaster proceeding from the catastrophic scene before them. It was a land where life of any sort, most of all human life, seemed incongruous and absurd.

McNair surveyed the landscape for a few moments in complete awe.

"Louie," he said presently, "I think without doubt this is the hatching-place of the devil."

The Indian dropped his pack at his feet and viewed the titanic malformations before them, assuming with total unconsciousness the immemorial attitude of the red man, arms folded, chin dropped above them, eyes peering out under sheltering brows.

"A suitable place for such an event," he replied. "Yet if I had my way, I would dwell here forever. It is savage enough, lawless enough, free enough, to speak to me with a powerful tongue. I am not all barbarian in blood, but in mind I am true brother to land such as this."

McNair marveled, but held his peace. In the Indian the loquacious white blood spoke. Louie would regret his confession shortly and probably not say anything for a week. But surely, somewhere under that contradictory exterior, there resided the fragments of a human soul.

"You said there was water in this country?"

"Plenty of it. We shall see numerous mountain sheep, wild remnants from tame stock wandering in and propagating. They make excellent shooting."

They made camp in the usual outdoor manner, except that in the matter of fire they used the simple expedient of canned heat, the tiny, intense flame cooking their coffee with the finished technique of an electric range. This first night they used water from their canteens, doling it out into the pot sparingly.

McNair spent his time after supper chipping off bits of lava with his small chisel.

"Plenty of obsidian, some low-grade corundum, but no pure aluminum oxide. When do you reckon this beautiful landscape quit smoking, Louie?"

"There is an old Nez Percé chief at Cœur d'Alene who told me that he can remember his grandfather telling him of

the last Big Smoke in this country. I presume there have been intermittent eruptions for generations. The chief's memory would put the date of the last one at about a hundred and fifty years ago."

McNair drew off his boots, nailed with heavy hobs and looked at them speculatively. Already, with but one day's travel across the iron and cinder flow, the nails were wearing down. He wondered what would be the fate of a man left shoeless in a country such as this.

They slept the first night in the calm of exhaustion and security. The Indian searched for a flat boulder, made sure there were no rattlers' dens about, and the two laid themselves down in the fraternity of the wild where as a matter of expediency the lion and the lamb sometimes become as blood brothers.

Morning blazed down upon them—a stage sun upon a stage inferno.

They traveled all day in a land that constantly aroused McNair's interest and surprize. No life seemed to exist save piñon pine and cactus, ant hills and mountain sheep. A lava stream of cobalt-blue held McNair's attention for an hour. There were crevasses which made wide detours necessary if they were to follow the course set by the compass; there were craters down which they tossed small boulders and listened in vain for the answering sound of their alighting; now and then they found tracks of small bear. Once the Indian's gun rang out unexpectedly, and the tawny, skulking body of a coyote dodged behind a cinder heap.

"Water near, when those fellows are about," he said.

An hour later they lay in the shadow of a boulder and face downward gulped water from a half-hidden spring, ice cold and rimmed with snow.

"If you had told me of this additional item, Louie, I might have further called you a liar," apologized McNair.

"If it would amuse you to have your credulity further strained, come here and let me show you an ice cave."

They clambered over the writhing and tortuous masses of lava a few rods and McNair followed the Indian through a fair-sized entrance into a cave. They lighted their fat tallow candles and glanced about. McNair could hardly credit his senses, yet the cave was lined with masses of ice which glowed with unimaginable beauty in the light from their small flickering torches. Stalactites and stalagmites joined in solid pillars and the frozen floor upon which they walked was as clear as water, the rock formation being visible beneath.

"What a cold-storage plant!" exclaimed McNair. "And if there were corundum here, we'd be apt to get pneumonia getting it out."

They refilled their canteens and went onward. The third night, as darkness fell, they camped in the doorway of the cave which Louie Bird declared was the object of their search.

Subtly, now that they were on the heels of real discovery, there came a change over the Indian. McNair, who had camped the world around with men of divers breeds, sensed it as an animal senses the presence of an enemy. He knew he was safe until some actual treasure came to light—after that it might be well to forego sleep for a time.

Louie helped to cook the evening meal with restrained impatience and smoked his pipe unsteadily in the dusky hour before turning in. What were the thoughts in his restless mind? There had been a hundred chances to dispose of a man in the country they had traversed—a slip into a fissure or into the bottomless cones—total obliteration in a second of time.

The first gleam of daybreak found them in the cave, searching in the light from candles stuck against the vermilion walls.

The cave showed no ice, but at the lower end was a small lake, black as ebony, in which blind trout swam, unheeding the light flashed into the depths of the water. In one corner of the cave silt and ash formed a low mound, topped by a flat piece of obsidian on which appeared rude tracings. It was a simple matter to move the stone aside and scoop back the mud and silt. It was when layer after layer of reed matting came to view that the Indian's composure began to lessen.

"Long time dead, this chief!" he muttered. McNair noted the reversion to pidgin English and the greed that shone in his beady eyes.

Between them they uncovered an ossified Indian body, buried in a sitting posture, the arms wound about the bent legs, the head pressed against the knees. About the

neck of the mummy hung proof of what Louie Bird had prophesied, the presence of red corundum somewhere in the vicinity. The chief wore as an ornament red beads the size of peas, only half-cut, and unbored, but strung by cementing the stones to rawhide strips. Louie's voice shook as he rose to his feet, the string in his hand.

"Now, perhaps you would be willing to look for a Rhodesian diamond mine!"'

There was insolence and triumph in his tone, and the intent of deadly sarcasm in his use of college English.

McNair tried to keep his expression as flat as his voice.

"It is a wise Indian who knows the difference between alumina and simple pyrope and almandite—garnets, old boy, if you know what I mean, and it looks to me as though those are garnets, and nothing but—a long way from being Burma rubies!"

"Then you will willingly pass over your half-interest to me?"

Something ominous came in that moment to the senses of McNair, a feeling of dread more portentous than that caused by the goblin shapes which leaped and pawed toward him from the flickering shadows—he knew that from now on it was his wits against those of the Indian.

"Hardly." And McNair's tone was even. "Our agreement still stands. If you don't care to look into the grave any further, trot out into the sunshine with your glass beads and count 'em. I'm going to salvage some of this pottery and these bronze axes if you don't mind."

"I do mind—there may be nuggets here."

The breed kneeled and tossed the dirt aside, probing into the corners of the grave, throwing out tools, utensils, earthen jars, arrow heads and many elk teeth. Finally he came upon what he sought, a handful of rough nuggets, varying in size from a hazel nut to a robin's egg. They might at the time of burial have been inclosed in a buckskin sack; now they lay alone in a little heap.

"Nothing but fool's gold." McNair spoke contemptuously. The Indian poured a stream of the pebbles into his hand.

"Lift!" he said. The weight dragged in McNair's hand. Whatever might be the value of the red stones, there was no doubt about this find.

"Well, old bean," remarked McNair with a stage yawn, "take the swag out where the daylight can shine on it. I'm more interested in figuring some way to get this Pharoah back to the Historical Society than I am in nuggets."

It seemed absurd to try and salvage the mummy and return with it on the arduous journey back to the Falls, yet McNair found that it weighed but lightly and when balanced upon his back added little to his burden.

As nothing further was found in the place, the Indian seemed willing enough to begin the return journey, though he made McNair hunt the cave over for the presence of corundum. McNair saw to it that both the beads and the gold remained in the breed's possession, and affected a total indifference as to the value of the stones.

"Garnets!" he muttered, more than once. "Look at their color. Too deep a red for ruby. The real ruby has a pale amethyst fire in sunlight. Wait till we turn one of those into a retort!"

The Indian's reply was an ominous silence.

It was impossible to travel more than five to eleven miles a day over the staggering formation and there was the constant lure of looking into giant cones and fissures and the excitement of examining bear tracks of unknown age, evidently printed into the lava while it was in a cooling stage.

McNair was not a timid man, yet the coming of the first night after the find filled him with a dull sort of apprehension. The Indian had fallen into a taciturnity unknown in the first half of the trip. There were hours when no word was exchanged between the two. The question of food had come up once—they were going short on the dehydrated supplies they had brought. McNair shot a horned owl, none too appetizing food but better than using their diminishing store.

They camped just as dusk set in. There was no moon, and McNair knew that in the darkness of that abysmal place he would have to depend upon his hearing alone to tell him the night movements of the breed. He lay awake a long time, looking at the blinking stars and breathing the strange slag-furnace smell of the place. But the hard going of the trip and the nervous strain of the day had worn down the fine edge of his resistance. He dreamed that the Talking Rock rose on legs and walked toward him swinging a pick—and woke to hear the

soft stirring of Louie in his blankets twenty feet away and the chink of steel on lava. McNair knew the Indian had succeeded in drawing a pick toward him.

He slept no more that night. Nor did he catch more than a few moments' sleep for many nights to come.

The succeeding days began to be a series of nightmares. The fantastic ruin of the country, the phantasmagorical scenes which surrounded their every daylight hour; the lack of sufficient food; the smoky water—snow melted over the fire—which he was compelled to drink because they so often now missed the water holes, and the gnawing ache for sleep, all had their effect on the archeologist's resistive powers. Hour by hour he could feel the lessening of his resiliency of body and mind. The racial endurance of the Indian was serving him better. In addition, he was getting his full quota of sleep. McNair now and then caught the flicker of a sardonic grin upon his cold mouth. As nearly as it could be without words, the battle was being waged in the open.

They had followed for an hour an unusually wide crevice in the lava, watching for a place sufficiently narrow to jump, McNair allowing the breed to keep well in advance. Both were well laden with their guns and packs, and McNair carried besides the mummy he was determined to present to the Historical Society at Boise.

"I think we can make it here," said the Indian, and with one leap of his agile body he cleared the bottomless pit that yawned beside them.

"What did you do that for?" complained McNair, surveying the dangerous distance, and laying down his mummy. "You know I can't make it with this load, and now she widens out again!"

"Hand me your gun, and toss your stuff over, then you can."

McNair was tired with tramping, nervous from lack of sleep, oppressed by the continual nightmare of this catastrophic land. For one second watchfulness forsook him. Unthinkingly he passed his high-power rifle across, stock first, balancing himself on the rim rock.

The Indian gave a powerful jerk and had it not been for the instant understanding of McNair, the violent backward thrust he gave his body and the heavy pack upon his back, he would have gone spinning helplessly downward into the middle of the earth as the Indian intended, instead of sprawling backward upon the sharp lava behind him.

There was in that moment a reawakening of McNair's old powers of cunning, powers which had served him well in every dangerous wild. While he still sprawled, he snapped out his Colt and leveled it across at the breed, who stood with feet braced apart, his face twisted with thwarted rage.

"Up with your hands, Louie!" And there was that in McNair's tone that makes the mastery of the full white over mixed blood.

Outlined against the sky the targets of Louie's short, square hands appeared and in the instant of regret that he must do what he was about to do, McNair thought on the remarkable accuracy of character betrayed in the hand of man.

There was the reverberating smash of two pistol shots and a scream of rage and pain from the Indian. It was a tribute to McNair's shooting that there grew a jagged red splotch in the palm of each of Louie's hands from whence the blood began to trickle in dark streams. Under the storm of frightful language that rained upon him, McNair leaped to his feet, tossed his pack across the intervening space and followed himself, with only a parting thought to his utterly vanished rifle and the mummy that had tumbled in at his own fall.

"Now, Louie Bird-That-Flies-in-the-Evening, we'll forget you are anything but just plain outlaw from now on into camp. I could have potted you through the heart just as well as not. And you can be thankful it is your hands and not your legs that are out of commission and that I'm not leaving you here for the coyotes and the vultures to pick at. See, Louie, how fast they come when they smell blood?"

But Louie had more to interest him than the two darkly wheeling vultures that began a distant circling in the sky.

FIVE days later the strange pair reached the Falls, the Indian hot with fever and staggering into Hennery's cabin half-supported by McNair, the infection in his hands having grown hour by hour since the accident on the rim rock of the big crevasse.

And so that is how it comes that Louie Bird went short of both hands and half of

one arm, all a matter of gangrene tardily cared for, a result that prevents to a great degree his carrying out any nefarious schemes of revenge that may seethe and boil in his unresting mind. Also that is how it comes that McNair mourns the loss of one pet mummy which lies in the pits of the earth and there is in Louie's possession as a reminder, if he does not have reminder enough, the string of rude red stones, ticketed by an expert as almandite mica, otherwise known to those of humble mind as garnets. As for the gold, there was just enough value in it when split ounce for ounce to buy McNair a gun of the sort that is most unhealthy for rhinos and walrus.

And there still stands, where it may be seen by you and all of us, the Talking Rock of Warm Springs, a mysterious and fascinating tablet, but whether it actually gives away secrets, as Louie believed it did, only Louie knows and Louie has vanished from the reservation, perhaps to sojourn and seek treasure in the earlier country of his fathers—that fantastic land, the Valley of the Moon.

Judgment by Steel

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by ARTHUR GILCHRIST BRODEUR

Author of "With Song and Sword," "The King's Choice," etc.

CERCAMON'S swift, sensitive instinct drew his eyes, in the midst of his singing, from the Count of Barcelona to the white-faced woman on the count's right hand. The notes faltered on his lips at sight of her ashy, frightened face; the next instant her scream cut short his song.

Then none had any list for song. Some leaped to their feet, startled and pale; others sat staring. But Count Raymond-Bérenger the Great rose slowly; his dark eyes rested, with terrible intentness, on the central figures in the sudden tragedy. And as he rose, all, men and women alike, turned toward him—all, save Cercamon the Troubadour, who could not take his eyes from the horror-stricken features of the Lady Maria de Moncada.

Beside her, hunched in his chair, sat Gomez of Moncal; and it was plain to all that Gomez was dead. His hand still clutched his thin-stemmed wine-glass, from which the blood-red wine had spilled upon the tablecover; his face was distorted in a horrible grimace of pain. His friend and lord, Perez de l'Arba, had reached across the dead man to seize Lady Maria's arm, which he still held in a cruel grip; and he was livid with anger.

"What is this?" the voice of Count Raymond, quiet and sinister, broke the silence.

It was then that Perez de l'Arba sprang up, his fury almost choking speech, and

hurled his accusation full in the face of the count his host:

"It is murder, no less! And you shall answer for it to my lord the king, as this treacherous woman shall answer to me! I call all men of honor to witness the hospitality which Barcelona shows to the envoys of Navarre!"

Cercamon, still watching Lady Maria, saw no change in the rigid horror that held her bound. But across the table from her a man raised his cup, and flung its contents full in de l'Arba's face.

"You lie, you dog of Navarre!" he cried. "And if you crave further answer, I will give it!"

De l'Arba clutched at his sword; but before he could draw, the Count of Barcelona was at his side.

"Be silent, Moncada!" he commanded. "This is too great a matter for a brawl. My lord de l'Arba, I fail to understand you. I see only that Gomez is dead, and that you impute the guilt to us. If you have accusation to make, make it plainly, and justice shall be done you."

The Navarrese ambassador, with a gesture of fury, cast down the napkin with which he had wiped the wine from his beard.

"Ay, that I will!" he shouted. "But now, while yonder troubadour was singing, my vassal Gomez drained his wine. This false woman"—he raised his hand, still clutching the arm of Lady Maria, whose fingers were tight-clenched—"filled his cup again; he drank, and straightway, with a groan, fell back as you see him now—dead. None other was near him save myself, his friend and master. I accuse Domna Maria de Moncada of his murder, by some subtle poison! See, how she holds her hand!"

He seized the woman's unresisting fingers and tore them apart, but there was nothing in them. For a moment he stared blankly; then, with a cry of savage triumph, he snatched something from the folds of her dress, and held it up. It was a small vial of Moorish glass.

The knights and ladies of the court gasped all at once, with a sound like the hiss of a wave on shingle; looks of horror were cast at the pale-faced woman, and many drew away from her, as if to escape some foul contagion. But he who had flung the wine in de l'Arba's face ran suddenly around the table's end, passed the count with little ceremony and snatched the vial from the ambassador's hand.

"If this was found on my wife's person," he cried through clenched teeth, "then it is harmless. I will pledge my honor for her innocence! See!"

He pulled the stopper from the flask, and raised it to his lips; but Count Raymond-Bérenger wrenched down his arm.

"Why risk a good soldier's life, when there are dogs?" he asked.

He whistled; and one of the great boarhounds that crouched by his chair lurched slowly to its feet. A servant brought a collop of meat, on to which Bérenger emptied the vial. The huge dog leaped to gulp down the meat in midair; but the next moment he quivered and stiffened, his eyes rolling and the hair on his neck bristling. A few seconds he stood so, growling in his throat; then he sank dead at his master's feet.

The count's eyes rested sorrowfully on the stricken face of the man he had saved.

"There can be no doubt now, I fear, Moncada. Faithful subject you have ever been to me, and I have held your lady as a pearl among women; but can you ask for clearer proof? She poured the wine that brought Gomez his death; the poison was found on her person. I fear there is nothing to be done save to hold her for trial."

"Trial!" De l'Arba laughed bitterly. "Does any man suppose that such a trial will do justice to us of Navarre? Will the Count of Barcelona inflict the penalty for murder on the wife of his foremost commander, because a Navarrese squire has been poisoned? Nay, that were too much indeed!"

The count turned on him with cold eyes.

"You have been our guest for two months," he answered. "In that time, have you seen any criminal escape our justice? Have you had any slight at our hands, that you should accuse us of condoning such an offense as this?"

Moncada, his gaze fixed balefully on de l'Arba, his hand on his sword, spoke before the Navarrese could answer:

"My lord count, my faith in my wife is as my faith in God. I have already given her accuser cause for quarrel; I now challenge him to put his cause to the trial by combat. It is an ancient and holy practise that, when a woman is accused of crime,

he who brings accusation may be forced to fight, in the open lists, with any who will defend her. As her husband, I claim the right to prove my wife's innocence by combat. I will be her champion, and God will show the right!"

Cercamon the Troubadour, who had not moved nor spoken since the interruption of his song, gazed with admiration at the man who, in spite of overwhelming proof, thus took his wife's quarrel on his shoulders. Not only was their cause seemingly hopeless, in that the woman's guilt was clear; but Andreu de Moncada was no match for the Navarrese envoy. A general of consummate skill and courage, Moncada was small of stature and weak of frame. Skilled as he was with weapons, he was not by half so famous a swordsman as de l'Arba, who had learned his craft against the Moors.

And the battle would begin with the lance—it could scarce reach the drawing of swords. One spear-thrust, with de l'Arba's giant weight behind the point—and all would be finished. Moncada would be slain in the lists; his wife's guilt would be considered proved, and she would be burned at the stake as a common poisoner.

"What say you, Viscount de l'Arba?" Raymond-Bérenger demanded. "Will you accept this challenge, and put your charge to trial by combat?"

The envoy hesitated.

"It would perhaps be best," he answered doubtfully, "to put her to the question. One turn of the thumbscrews——"

Count Raymond flushed scarlet.

"For shame!" he cried. "If your cause is just, you should not fear to defend it. I torture no women, my lord!"

Moncada, who had thrust himself between his wife and her accuser, bent down and whispered in her ear. Her pale face relaxed a little, and she answered—softly, but so that those nearest her could hear:

"As I hope for mercy in heaven, I know nothing of all this! I am innocent!"

Moncada looked up, his eyes full of calm confidence.

"My lord count," he said, "I am satisfied that my wife speaks truth. If this fellow does not accept my challenge, I will proclaim him a coward in every court in France and Spain!"

De l'Arba's features were impassive; yet the watching troubadour seemed to detect a faint smile just curling his lip.

"They who know me," the Navarrese retorted, "scarce call me coward. I accept your challenge, Viscount de Moncada. But I must ask for two months' respite before we meet in the lists. I have much to do, both to order my own estate, and in the service of my king, before I risk my body even in a just cause. My lord count, will you inter my friend's body in consecrated ground?"

Raymond-Bérenger assented; the dead man was carried reverently out. But de l'Arba was not satisfied.

"And this woman?" he asked. "I can not consent that she go free and unwatched. She might escape before the combat."

"I will myself vouch for her!" Moncada broke in angrily; but the count shook his head.

"In this we must do justice to Navarre," he said. "You must remember, Moncada, that her crime is proved in men's eyes already. I fear God's judgment also will go against you, and that I must lose my most trusted servant. Ho, Canfranc! Lead my Lady of Moncada to Montjuich Keep, and confine her in the tower! See that she lacks no comfort—and your life be forfeit if she escapes!"

TWO hours later the troubadour, from the rampart of the outer wall, watched the ambassador of Navarre emerge from the westward city gate and take his way toward the distant heights of Tibidabo.

The captain of the tower edged up to Cercamon, and pointed to the gallant figure of de l'Arba, mounted on a magnificent charger and topped by a scarlet plume.

"He took swift leave," the soldier muttered.

"Too swift," answered Cercamon. "There are fivescore men in his train, and eight baggage-wagons. It almost seems as if he had been ready for his departure before the feast."

The captain nodded.

"I am an old soldier," he said, "and often have I set off on sudden errands; and never could I have sped a hundred men away so fast as this without preparation. Yet how could he have foreseen his friend's murder?"

Cercamon was silent; and after a moment the captain answered his own question.

"Magic, perhaps," he conjectured. "Men say that this de l'Arba is no good Christian.

He has been much among the heathen Moors, who are great sorcerers, and have foreknowledge of the future."

"Mayhap," the troubadour replied. "But if he could have foreseen Gomez' death by magic, he could have prevented it by magic. And none could have been more overwhelmed by rage and grief at the murder than he."

He turned away and climbed slowly down from the wall, pondering.

Cercamon was not quartered in the palace, for he was yet a stranger to Barcelona. A fortnight since, early in June of 1137, he had ridden in to claim refuge from persecution, a hearing for his unequaled voice and polished songs, and a chance to win the favor of a new master.

Born a Gascon, a vassal of Aquitaine, he had been high in the good graces of the Duchess Aliénor, until that all-too lovely mistress of Aquitaine, Poitou, and half the South had become betrothed to Louis VII, King of France. Her golden fetters had irked him, for she was a woman of base heart; and when she had turned his faithful service into a means for the dishonorable advancement of her ambition, he had spoken his mind of her, in her own presence and publicly.

Hence he was now masterless, exiled from France, with a price upon his head. His golden voice being his passport to the good will of princes, he had crossed the Pyrenees to the court of Raymond-Bérenger, where men of his calling had ever found welcome and riches.

Bérenger and his courtly Catalans had heard Cercamon's songs with favor; gold had already begun to flow into the troubadour's lap. But though he was welcomed, he was not yet trusted; for had he not been a servant of Aquitaine, that most dreaded enemy of Barcelona? Therefore he had not yet been taken formally into the count's service, but still dwelt outside the palace, in an ancient side-street that led off the spacious, flower-bordered Rambla. Toward this he now made his way, disturbed at heart and troubled in mind.

Of all who had witnessed the death of Gomez, Cercamon had been perhaps the calmest. The rest—de l'Arba excepted—were Barcelonans, deeply concerned in the fate of Maria de Moncada and her husband by reason of ancient friendship. Moreover, Moncada was the shield and sword of the land: his military genius had twice saved the city from siege, and many times adorned her walls with conquered banners. But Cercamon was still a stranger to the actors in the tragedy; he still knew little of their feuds and interests.

Yet he was young, and a Gascon, with the hot heart and the cool head of his race. He had grown to manhood in a land that, above all else, cherished the spirit of chivalry and a reverence for women that was almost worship. In the courts of southern France he had drunk the very quintessence of that chivalry, whose doctrines imposed on the strong and noble, as their first duty, the protection of the weak. And if many a knight or baron forgot that duty to serve his own greed or passion, the troubadour, as the high priest of chivalry, could never forget it.

Cercamon's imagination held ever before his eyes the ghastly scene in the hall of the palace: the murdered Gomez, slumped in his chair with twisted features; the frightened woman on his right, her angry accuser towering on his left; across the table, the slight, but heroic Andreu de Moncada, hurling his wine in the huge dé l'Arba's face. And, Gascon as he was, the troubadour felt the woman's terrror tug at his heart, no less than her husband's brave defiance and noble trust in her.

Nor was it merely his heart that was convinced of Lady Maria's innocence. In those few poignant minutes he had watched the scene with eyes undimmed by prejudice or suspicion. Those knights and ladies of Catalonia who had drawn aside from her in loathing—to them, this cold-blooded murder was an insult to Barcelona's honor, a hideous violation of hospitality, which brought disgrace on them all. It needed only an accusation to turn their scorn and disgust against the accused. To them, nobles, touched on the raw of their honor, the evidence of the vial was overwhelming proof of guilt.

So would it have been to Cercamon, but for two things: first, his eyes had seen the horror on Lady Maria's face when her scream tore through his song; and none who looked on murder with such a face could have plotted it. More than any other in the hall, she had been overwhelmed by the crime. And the other consideration was this: though de l'Arba himself had proposed that a confession be wrung from

her by torture, yet Cercamon had seen a tiny smile twitch on de l'Arba's lips when the count refused.

This was not much, but it was enough for Cercamon, who could not see a woman in distress without condemning, almost unheard, him who had distressed her. And now—de l'Arba had gone, completing his preparations for departure with suspicious swiftness.

In a hard school of intrigue and blows Cercamon had learned to think without losing sight of that which went on about him; and the throng that filled the Rambla as he walked along its upper end were worth his notice. The Catalans are a social folk, brisk and eager in talk, fond of company. Every day, two hours before sunset, it was their wont to drop their labor and walk the streets, where friend would chat with friend and neighbor barter gossip and banter with neighbor. For one brief hour, men and women alike put on their gayest garments for the gladdest portion of the day.

But few were the nobles who strolled thus down the white street and between the lofty brick houses; it was beneath the dignity of men of blood to dodge between prancing horses and creaking fruit-carts, or to rub elbows with the rabble. Nay, this daily promenade was a custom of the bourgeois, from solid merchants in furred velvet to free artisans in fustian.

Today the streets were as thickly thronged as usual; but there was no gay clatter of brisk tongues, no bright kerchiefs, no thrust and riposte of quip and sally. All walked soberly, with grim faces and silent tongues; and every man and woman was dressed in black, or wore at least a scrap of cheap crape.

The news of the calamity which had befallen the Viscountess of Moncada had turned their joy into mourning; this Cercamon understood, having heard much of the people's love for her, and their admiration for her husband. And though he was still too new in Barcelona to realize the adoration with which the common folk of the city worshiped Andreu de Moncada, their "little captain-general," Cercamon was quick to feel the resentment with which all drew aside when he passed, in his gay mantle of blue velvet and his scarlet hose.

Sensing the macabre contrast of his fine raiment with their mourning, Cercamon was glad when he turned aside at the mouth of his own street; and he hastened to his lodgings as fast as his feet would bear him.

The narrow, twisting lane was dark even at midday, and now no ray of light pierced its gloom. He dwelt in an old house built centuries before, during the Moorish domination: it was flat-roofed, with a narrow entrance like the black mouth of a well, a massive, iron-studded door, and latticed windows. Cercamon turned into the dark entrance and reached for the ring of the door; but a sinewy hand caught him by the shoulder and spun him about.

"Cercamon the Troubadour?" a gruff voice questioned.

Cercamon flung the hand aside. "Aye," he answered, "but you need not paw me."

Ignoring his answer, the other announced bruskly:

"The count commands your presence. Follow me!"

As he stepped into the street, the troubadour saw that his companion was a man-at-arms in full mail. There was no ignoring such a summons, no matter how Cercamon disliked the manner of its delivery.

They passed swiftly and silently through the streets, the folk giving them room with sullen glances at Cercamon's finery. But the way to the palace was not long; it lay in a wide square a little way down the Rambla, north of the promenade. There was little life in that square, for—since the tragedy of the early afternoon—the people avoided it. There were none but soldiers stirring about the palace gate.

Under the archway they passed, into a Moorish court bright with flowers and evergreen shrubs. Here they were halted as the guard was changed; then they were permitted to cross to another gate and a huge, square staircase. The count's apartments lay in the east wing, high above the old city, overlooking its flat roofs and the port beyond.

At the soldier's knock, the door opened, and a spearman stood aside to let them enter. A page, lounging against a pillar, sprang to attention, and then disappeared into an inner room. After a moment he returned, to bid them come before the count. They followed into an apartment that had once been Romanesque, but which was now garnished with captured Moorish columns from Cordova.

RAYMOND-BÉRENGER sat at a massive table, facing the door. He was a young man, scarce five years older than the troubadour, huge-limbed, and with features which, for all their fineness, were hard and stern. Descended from the heavy-handed duke who had once held Barcelona for Charlemagne, he had inherited all that great bodily and mental strength which had distinguished his ancestor's heroic conflicts with Basque and Moor.

Beside him stood an officer in lizard-mail and scarlet cloak, listening in silence as the count pointed out positions on a parchment chart. As Cercamon entered, Bérenger looked up, handed the chart to his companion and dismissed him. The count turned directly to Cercamon; his face was stern, and his eyes troubled.

"You must leave the city at once!" he said abruptly.

Cercamon stared at him in dismay.

"But I can not, your grace!" he protested. "Whither should I go? All France is full of my enemies. Moreover, you have promised me protection."

"Aye, so I did," the count rejoined, "and for that very reason I now bid you go. The populace is in fury over the charge brought against the Lady Maria, and no foreigner is safe."

"But what have I——"

"Neither you nor any other foreigner, so far as I know, had anything to do with the murder of Gomez. I say, *so far as I know*. But the mob does not think when its favorites are imperiled—it strikes. My officers report that the people lay Gomez' death and the charge against Lady Maria to a foreign plot; therefore they are clamoring against all foreigners. You know what rumors fly in the city streets at the first whisper of calamity. Today the people only talk of killing; tomorrow they may kill. You are not only a stranger, but—what is worse—an Aquitanian subject, the vassal of Barcelona's worst enemy. If the mob takes the law into its hands, your head will be the first to fall."

Cercamon shrugged his shoulders.

"If your grace permits me to stay," he said, "I will run the risk."

The count looked at him searchingly.

"I do not wish you to stay. What if my people are right? What if that which has befallen is the fruit of a foreign plot? I know no more of you than you told me when you came hither, and your reputation as singer, swordsman, and schemer. It is common report that, in Aquitaine's service, your shrewdness was of more value to the Duchess Aliénor than a thousand spears. I grant that you have told me, and rumor also has it, that the queen-duchess has banished you for daring to speak the truth of her; but how am I to know that you and rumor are honest?"

Cercamon's handsome face flushed scarlet, and his blue-green eyes blazed.

"I have some little repute," he retorted proudly, "for speaking truth, and for convincing doubters with my sword!"

Bérenger smiled faintly.

"You have indeed that reputation; and as a troubadour, you have the right to challenge any peer of France. But I do not fear you, nor can you hold me blameworthy for my doubts. The Duchess of Aquitaine, always my enemy, is now twice as powerful to harm me because she is Queen of France. You have been in her service. It is her trickery that I fear: how can I be sure that your exile is not a pretense, to place in my court a spy and a mischief-monger? And you could be a dangerous spy, from what men say of you. When you came to me, I took your word and welcomed you; but now murder and dissension have flared up in my very palace. Whom should I more naturally suspect than you?"

Cercamon was wellnigh choking with rage.

"My lord," he answered, "you can thrust me out of your realm, but you have no right to insult me!"

"A fortnight after your coming," the count resumed calmly, without heeding his outburst, "a servant of the Navarrese envoy is poisoned in my very presence, and the wife of my most trusted subject is accused of the murder. So strong is the evidence against her that I was forced to choose between handing her over for a trial that would have been a condemnation, and risking her husband's life in a trial by combat. Think you that I believe her guilty? Lady Maria is incapable of such a deed. It is a vile, cunning trick, designed by my enemies to bring about a new war between Barcelona and Navarre. Navarre is too weak to oppose me alone; but what if she is assured of the help of—Aquitaine?

Deprived of the genius of my first commander—for Moncada can not overcome de l'Arba in the lists—my armies drawn away to resist a possible invasion from Navarre, I should find my borders menaced by ten thousand seasoned Aquitanian spears. Caught between two hostile forces, Barcelona could be stripped of her fairest provinces!"

"Your grace!" Cercamon broke in in consternation. "Mean you that I—that I am Aquitaine's instrument for murder and conspiracy? Did you not see that I was a full dozen paces from Gomez when he perished?"

"Aye," Bérenger retorted, "and who was near him? Only the Lady of Moncada, who is incapable of the crime imputed to her, and de l'Arba, his friend! Whom should I suspect, if not the one man present who was neither a friend to Gomez nor a Barcelonan?"

Cercamon ground his teeth.

"All my life I have lived in honor!" he cried. "No word has ever been breathed against my good name, and now— If your grace holds me a spy and a murderer, why bid me leave the city? Why not burn me at the stake?"

"Because," Bérenger replied, "there is no evidence against you, and I am a fair man."

"Then, if you are fair, I have an offer; send me not away, but *forbid* me to depart, and see to it that every man on guard at the gates has orders to prevent my escape from Barcelona; but let me go where I will within the city, unwatched. Then I, who likewise believe Lady Maria guiltless, will strive to learn the truth in this matter, and to find the murderer. If I succeed, before the trial by combat, then you shall make me public amends for the insults you have heaped upon me, and take me into your service; if I fail, seize me and slay me!"

Bérenger's eyes gleamed curiously.

"Leave you unwatched within the city?" he repeated. "Well, I will agree. But you must prove your case to the full. I will not listen to mere suspicions, or to the testimony of interested witnesses."

"When I come to you, I will come with complete proofs!"

"Good!" the count assented. "May you have success!"

Cercamon left the palace with tingling ears and clenched fists. His proposal, desperately made to clear his honor of the charge against it, had been accepted so swiftly that he scarce knew what to think. As his brain cooled, two things acquired new importance in his thoughts; not only was Bérenger willing to let him—suspected of conspiracy as he was—wander freely within the city walls; but the count, at the very moment when his insults were most intolerable, had trusted himself alone with Cercamon, who bore the repute of being one of the most perilous swordsmen in France. The troubadour began to suspect that Bérenger had meant from the first to use him—had insulted him only to force him into using his well-known shrewdness in Barcelona's cause.

This impression gained intensity as Cercamon strode toward his lodgings. The folk, still in mourning, thronged the streets; as he passed, they glared at him savagely, and drew together, muttering. They, at least, loved the house of Moncada, and believed its lady innocent; if events went against her, they would show their teeth. Even the count himself might find himself in mortal danger if Moncada were killed in the lists by the terrible adversary he must meet. Already inflamed, passionately devoted to the Moncadas, their idol's death would snap the bonds of law and vassalage, and they would rise in their thousands to rescue his lady from the flames. A mob that tastes blood is the most terrible thing on earth. Most prudently, as soon as he returned to his lodgings, Cercamon cast off his fur-trimmed robes and put on a close tunic and hose of black velvet. He would show mourning with the folk, and so escape their hostility and, if possible, move unnoticed among them. Then he sat down to think out his problem.

His position was one of deadly peril. He had but two months to prove Lady Maria innocent, despite the strongest evidence, and to find the murderer; else he must die. Nor had he the fragment of an idea where or how to begin his task. All the known facts were against Lady Maria; he had only his own and the count's conviction of her innocence to go on, apart from those two tiny points of de l'Arba's over-hasty departure and his unmeant proposal of the torture. And none could give more light.

The court, he knew, was divided in its opinion; but most of the nobles were bitter

against the Moncadas. In their attitude, envy for the glory Moncada had won, jealousy for his favor with the count played no little part; but these only disposed them to accept the evidence of the poison-vial, damning in itself. With court on one side and people on the other, Barcelona might well find itself in the throes of a revolution. If so, would the soldiers be true to the count, whose pay they took, or go over to the people? For the army loved Moncada, who had led them to many victories. Cercamon's first task was clearly to learn the attitude of the troops.

AT NIGHT, therefore, when the watch was changed, he went to the fort on Montjuich, and was admitted to the guardroom. The great, square enclosure was lighted by flaring torches stuck in cressets, and a good half-hundred men lounged about, polishing mail, talking, and drinking.

Had they all been Catalans, Cercamon's task would have been a hard one: for Catalans are ugly and suspicious in time of tension, however merry on all ordinary occasions. But Raymond-Bérenger's high ambitions, his ceaseless feuds and bickerings with his neighbors in both France and Spain, required a larger army than Catalonia could support; wherefore the ranks, and even some few high places in his service, were swelled out with professional soldiers from Provence, Languedoc, Auvergne, and even that part of Gascony—namely Auch—which had not yet submitted itself to Aquitaine's dominion. Bérenger ran no risk in this, for he paid his mercenaries so well that his enemies could scarce tempt any considerable number away from their loyalty. Even the garrison of his citadel, Montjuich, was but half-Catalan.

Cercamon's entry into the guardroom was hailed with cheers from the Gascon members of the new-relieved watch. His own Gascon birth, and his fame as a troubadour, ensured him a welcome among them. All but the Catalans soon responded; a sergeant rose to broach a cask of wine; more lights were fetched; a dozen hands plucked Cercamon into the centre of the great room.

"A song, a song!" they cried; and he sang to the rough men-at-arms as if they had been nobles in silks and jewels. Thereafter they talked freely with him; and it was not long before they reached the subject closest to all their hearts.

"You were there, troubadour!" a Catalan called to him. "Tell us what you saw with your own eyes, that we may know the truth! We do not believe, we soldiers, that any of the name of Moncada would murder!"

As he spoke, the man's eyes dwelt on Cercamon's black garb, and the troubadour was glad that he had clothed himself in accord with the general feeling. He told the tale of Gomez' death and Moncada's brave defense of his wife; and the soldiers responded with growls of rage or cheers of approval.

Nor could Cercamon hide his own sympathies; as he depicted Moncada throwing the wine into de l'Arba's face, the company burst into prolonged applause. Though they could tell him little in return, Cercamon learned from their frank emotion one thing of which he had known little: the true greatness of Andreu de Moncada, and the great love which they who followed his banner bore for him.

"He is a gallant cock, our little Andreu!" a burly Provençal declared. "Often have I seen him throw himself into the press of fight beside the humblest of us."

"Small good that does," retorted a Catalan. "His brain is worth a thousand pairs of hands, but his arms are worth nothing. So long as he sits in his tent and plans work for us, all goes well; but when his high spirit overmasters him, then we must rescue his puny body from the strokes of stronger men."

A master of engines—fugitive from Toulouse, whose cunning hand with his catapults earned him a place of honor among the garrison—bawled to be heard, and the others gave him respectful attention.

"Look you," he said thoughtfully, "our little Andreu's high spirit has led him at last into a trap from which no man's hand can save him. De l'Arba will hack him into gobbets. And it is in my mind that the King of Navarre will be very grateful to de l'Arba. Nothing could help Navarre so much as just this "trial by combat," as they call it. Trial, forsooth? It is rank butchery! Where will Barcelona be without her captain-general? When next we meet the spears of Navarre—led, mind you, by this very de l'Arba, who is a great

soldier—it will go ill with us that our little Andreu is not there to plan our attack and to marshal our ranks!"

"You think war will break out again?" Cercamon asked.

"I smell war!" the engineer answered. "It is the chance Navarre has prayed for. Not that we can not drub Navarre even without Moncada; but Navarre will find allies. All the world is jealous of Barcelona. Aye, we shall have more fighting than we can stomach. King Garcia of Navarre would give mountains of gold for Andreu's head, and de l'Arba is the man to get it for him. Do ye know what they call Garcia in Navarre, eh? 'The Restorer!' Restorer of what? Why, the border castles we won from him a year since!"

"You do not think," Cercamon exclaimed, "that there is a Navarrese plot behind the murder of Gomez? He was de l'Arba's friend!"

"Plot?" the engineer echoed. "What know I of plots? I am a soldier, no more. As a soldier, I know that, when Moncada maintained his wife's innocence in de l'Arba's teeth, and challenged de l'Arba to combat, he gave Navarre the chance she has longed for. Moncada is Barcelona's shield and sword, and he must be wrenched from our count's hands, if Navarre is to win back the lands and glory we have taken from her. Mark my words, troubadour: brave little Andreu has walked into a cunningly laid trap!"

"You call a fair duel a trap?" Cercamon countered. "You do not believe, then, that trial by combat results in the triumph of the right? Why, it is a direct appeal to God's judgment!"

His words were childlike in their assumption of innocence, and not only the master of engines, but all his comrades, burst into sullen laughter.

"And Cercamon the Swordsman asks that!" a Catalan scoffed. "We are fighting men, and know something of the fortunes of war. When Guilhem of Aquitaine seized Toulouse, he was successful, but was he right? Did not the Moors once conquer this land, though they, as heathen dogs, were in the wrong? Do you think that a few pious words muttered at the beginning of a duel can alter the outcome? Pah! It is always the cunning and the strong who win! I tell you, de l'Arba will tear Moncada in pieces, Lady Maria will be burnt for murder, and right and wrong will have little to do with it!"

"Right you are, Pedralbes!" the engineer approved. "But do not let our chaplain hear you say such words. As good Christians, we are bound to pretend that trial by combat is ruled by God's will, though we know it to be murder."

Cercamon sprang to his feet.

"Look ye, lads!" he cried. "Were it not well if something happened to prevent Moncada from meeting so perilous a foe? Perchance Lady Maria's innocence can be proved before the combat, and a meeting in the lists avoided?"

The engineer shook his head.

"Nothing but death can prevent our Andreu from meeting de l'Arba now. That which has passed between them must be washed out in blood. That you know better than I, troubadour, for you have the name of being touchy in matters of honor. But before God! If I and my comrades could prevent that meeting, and still save Lady Maria, we would do it though we died for it! Would we not, lads?"

The shout that answered him left no doubt of the love Moncada's spearmen felt for him. Cercamon rose, reaching a hand to the Toulousan.

"I for one," he said, "make no doubt that she is innocent, and I have never seen a braver man than Andreu de Moncada. To save them from death I would do as much as you. But this is the way the matter lies:

"If Moncada fails to meet de l'Arba in the lists on the day set, de l'Arba wins by default. If they meet, de l'Arba will win in any case. Both court and church will regard either outcome as proof of the lady's guilt, and she will be burnt. Moncada's death in the duel will imperil Barcelona; and it is to Navarre's interest that he be killed outright. There is only one escape, and that is by de l'Arba's defeat—which would require a miracle."

"Miracles do not happen to those who need them!" the engineer scoffed.

"Perchance not," Cercamon conceded, "but I am prepared to do all that a man can to work a miracle in this case. I know not how; but I ask you to give me your name, so that if you can help me with the miracle, I may find you without delay."

"I am Jehan Bigot," the engineer answered, his dark eyes boring into the

troubadour's blue-green ones. "If you can find a way to save our Andreu and his lady, my life is yours to command; and there are others here who say the same. A health, lads, to Cercamon!"

The toast was drunk with ringing cheers; and after it Cercamon climbed the stairs of the fort's tower to seek the chaplain. The soldiers sat silent, their enthusiasm slowly sinking before their fears. At last Pedralbes the Catalan spoke heavily:

"I have heard that Cercamon is the shrewdest man in France; and we know his fame as a swordsman. But I fear miracles are beyond his skill!"

"Aye," Bigot answered. "But grind your blade sharp, for my nose tells me this troubadour will lead some of us into perilous hazards!"

MARIA DE MONCADA rose from her knees, and saw, with some astonishment, the dark figure of a priest standing in the doorway. He was clad in the black gown of the Benedictines; his cowl was drawn over his face.

"What brings me the honor of this second visit, father?" she asked.

The black-robed figure flung back the cowl that masked his features, and carefully closing the door, moved so that the light from the single window fell upon his face. Lady Maria would have cried out; but he silenced her with a gesture.

"Fear not," he said. "I have come to help you, if I can. I am Cercamon the Troubadour."

"Only God can help me now," she answered.

"Yet it may be that God will make me His instrument. The Count of Barcelona, who is convinced of your blamelessness, has commissioned me to prove your innocence and to discover the murderer of Gomez."

The woman started; a smile of joy made her pale features radiant.

"Our lord believes me innocent!" she repeated.

"Aye. But if I am to help you, I must know many things that are now hidden from me; and from your lips I must learn all that you can tell me concerning de l'Arba. Does he in truth think you guilty? Was his accusation made in good faith? Or is he—as I have heard whispered—the agent of some secret plot, the furtherance of which requires your and your husband's destruction? If you can not tell me these things, no one can. To learn them, I went first to the chaplain of the fort, who is now your confessor. He refused to reveal anything that you had told him, being forbidden to speak the secrets of the confessional. But when I had convinced him that I came for a good purpose and on the count's authority, he lent me his gown, that I might gain access to you. For it is forbidden for any to see you during your imprisonment save Father Gervasius and the governor of the fort, lest you should escape. I gave my solemn promise not to misuse the good priest's kindness, and shall surrender his robe to him so soon as I win past the guard again."

For some moments Lady Maria pondered, her eyes seeking Cercamon's as if to read them.

"You are a foreigner," she said at last, "a Gascon. Why should you take interest in us, who are Barcelonans? Nay, I will believe you; for if the count and good Father Gervasius trust you, I were both foolish and ungrateful not to do so. Yet I fear I can tell you little. I know nothing of the murder; I know neither by whom nor for what end it was committed. It is true that de l'Arba wishes ill to my husband, and now his hatred will ruin us both —since my husband is no match for him in the lists. But I can not think that de l'Arba had aught to do with Gomez' death, for Gomez was his faithful friend. And if de l'Arba had naught to do with the murder, then he can not be suspected of causing the misfortune that has befallen me."

"Then de l'Arba is your enemy?" Cercamon cried, his eyes brightening. "Because of your husband's victories over Navarre, or for private reasons?"

"Both," Maria answered, plainly with reluctance. "He is a ruthless man, treacherous and evil, who would have used my husband to ruin Barcelona. His hatred against us began when I refused to help his designs."

"Ah! How would he have used you?"

Maria de Moncada's eyes glowed a little with pride.

"My husband," she explained, "led Barcelona to victory over Navarre a year ago. No other man in Spain is so skilled in the ordering of battles. Knowing that

Navarre could never hope to regain her losses while Andreu de Moncada captained the troops of Barcelona, King Garcia sent de l'Arba hither—on the pretense of a political mission, but with the hidden purpose of buying my husband over to Navarre. De l'Arba knows how to read men, and soon recognized that to approach my husband with such an offer would be to invite discovery of his base purpose. Therefore, instead of speaking to Andreu, he came to me."

"But why to you? Is not your loyalty known?"

"Because I was born in Navarre. Hoping that my love for the land of my birth might prove stronger than my faith to my husband, knowing how my husband trusts me and confides in my judgment, de l'Arba promised me wealth and high honor if I would persuade Andreu to flee to Navarre, and become commander of the Navarrese army. I dared not reveal his treachery or betray his plans to my husband; for he swore that, if I betrayed his confidence, he would deny my accusations and challenge my husband to combat. Well he knew that I would not dare expose my husband to such a peril. For a meeting between de l'Arba and Andreu in the lists means my husband's death; and would not only bring wretchedness to me, but would deprive Barcelona of her finest soldier."

"And now," mused Cercamon, "he has gained his purpose. For your husband must fight him to prove your innocence. But why, if he needed only your husband's death to help Navarre, did he not hire an assassin to stab Don Andreu?"

"Because he desires not merely to rob Barcelona of my husband's services, but to win them for Navarre; and to the last he hoped to persuade or compel me to help his design. When promises of gold and titles failed, he would have made love to me, to win my husband through my heart. Only when that, too, failed did he let me know the deadliness of his hate. I can not think that he himself caused Gomez' death, for a man does not poison his friends; but so soon as Gomez died he seized the opportunity to destroy me and force a quarrel with my husband."

"Gomez—or so I have heard—was de l'Arba's vassal as well as his friend," Cercamon mused. "As a Navarrese by birth, you should know something of the noble families of the land. Has Gomez heirs?"

"He was unmarried," Maria answered.

"Ha!" Cercamon exclaimed. "Then you may rest assured that none but de l'Arba murdered him! He must have dropped the poison in Gomez' cup while all—Gomez, yourself, the count, and all—were intent on my song; then he dropped the vial in the folds of your gown. His friend, forsooth? Aye, many a man has been untrue to his friend, and de l'Arba's baseness toward you proves him vile enough to murder one who trusted him. You know the feudal law—when a vassal dies, leaving no heirs, his possessions revert to his lord! De l'Arba found his friend's possessions and your husband's death more valuable than his friend, by whose murder he could not only enrich himself, but also compel your husband to risk his life to clear you. He trusts his own ability to slay Don Andreu, and thereby both serve Navarre and win a rich revenge on you. And I fear that he will succeed—unless his treachery can be proved to the count's satisfaction."

Lady Maria was pale and trembling.

"But you will go to the count and tell him?" she pleaded. "He will believe you, since he has commanded you to help us!"

Cercamon put aside her fluttering hands.

"It is not so easy," he answered sadly. "The count has commanded me to prove you innocent, and to find complete proofs against the murderer, before I come to him. 'Neither suspicions, nor the testimony of interested witnesses,' were his words to me. If I should go to him with your story, he would believe it, but he would not be justified in acting on it. The evidence against you was such that, in justice to Navarre, he can not take your statement against it. It is your word against de l'Arba's; and in the eyes of all men it seems fair that the truth be settled by an appeal to God's decision, through trial by combat. To avert that combat, which means death to your husband and condemnation for you, I must not only find a strong case against de l'Arba, but catch him with the proofs of his villainy upon him. That is my task; though it is not light, I trust that what you have told me will make it easier. Keep a high heart, for I shall succeed!"

He turned to go, glancing back in pity at the unhappy woman. Lifted to hope

by her confidence in the power of her revelations to save herself and her husband, strengthened by her trust in Cercamon's influence with the count, she had been dashed back into despair by his last words.

"I shall succeed!" he repeated. "My own life is pledged upon it!"

He hid his features in his cowl, opened the door, and stepped out. A soldier shot the bolt after him.

"Is it well with her, father?" he asked anxiously.

"It is well," Cercamon answered, striving to imitate the voice of the chaplain.

Wrapping his disguise closely about him, he descended to Father Gervasius' cell.

CERCAMON knew better than to report to Raymond-Bérenger what Lady Maria had told him. As he had assured her, the count would have believed, but—in his capacity of just judge between accuser and accused—could not have given more weight to it than to the damning fact that the vial of poison was actually found on Maria's person. Nor, once the trial by combat had been arranged, could Bérenger interfere with it. Church and state both upheld the sanctity of this absurd method of justice. If Cercamon were to help at all, he must find complete and damning proofs against de l'Arba.

But the combat was still two months away, and he soon learned that there was little he could do for the present. De l'Arba was in Navarre, ordering his affairs; and if he had left behind him any loose threads of his evil-doing, he had concealed them well. Therefore Cercamon spent his days in the unsatisfying task of gathering opinions, and of making such friends at court as he could. For he knew not how deep his task might lead him into peril or into need of help; and he had long since learned the value of honest friends.

The next ten days Cercamon devoted assiduously to the court, where his position had become that of a partisan. Raymond-Bérenger, anxious to leave him a free hand, neither interfered with nor rebuffed him; the count had set Cercamon his task, and if the troubadour chose to spend his two months of grace among the ladies and the fine gentlemen of the palace, that was his affair.

But among the nobles themselves Cercamon had already won the favor that the South accorded a skilful courtier and a polished singer; and this favor he now deliberately compromised with the faction which opposed the Moncadas. His black garb proclaimed him in sympathy with the folk, and an adherent of Lady Maria.

A large minority of the nobles, jealous of the Moncadas and embittered against them by an honest belief in Lady Maria's guilt, at once turned a cold shoulder on Cercamon—the colder because he, a foreigner, dared to show a preference in their quarrels. But the pro-Moncada faction, which fed and grew on its intense patriotism, eagerly welcomed him as an ally.

In spite of their prejudice against his birth, it was easy for Cercamon to win their confidence. The half-French, half-Spanish culture of Barcelona was a brilliant polish on the surface of their wild Catalan nature; France was the source and inspiration of all that they admired; and Cercamon was a courtly Frenchman. His repute as a swordsman appealed to their martial fire; his gift of song won them through their sensitiveness to beauty and grace. His songs won from the Moncada faction more applause than ever; great lords listened eagerly to his tales of love and martial adventure, and their ladies smiled on his graceful handsomeness. If Moncada's enemies shunned him, the captain-general's friends heaped him with gold and honors.

They also talked freely to him, both of the murder of Gomez and of its probable consequences for Barcelona. All were agreed that, if de l'Arba slew Moncada, Navarre would seize the opportunity to assail its ancient enemy; and that Barcelona, thus deprived of its great commander, would be hard put to it for defense.

Moncada's foes were by no means foes to the state: the nobles were all devoted to their land and their count. But they envied Moncada his position in the count's esteem; and with all their fiery souls they resented the blot on their honor which they ascribed to Lady Maria's crime. Their belief in her guilt was fed both by their envy and by their pride in the good name of their land; and they had seen with their own eyes the discovery of the poison. Between this faction and Moncada's partisans quarrels were frequent; challenges passed, and a dozen deaths resulted.

Therefore Bérenger forbade all quarrels under pain of death.

On the tenth day the court was plunged into consternation by a rumor that Aragon had broken its treaty of alliance with Barcelona. Three years before, King Alphonso the Battler had died, leaving no heir to reign over Aragon save his brother Ramiro, a weak man, already in holy orders. Rather than expose his kingdom to the rule of an incapable king, Alphonso bequeathed it as a trust to the mighty military orders, the Knights of the Temple and the Hospital.

But his barons, jealous of these mighty brotherhoods, violated Alphonso's will, called Ramiro from his cloister, and forced the scepter into his unwilling hands. Against his will Ramiro took a queen; and so soon as a daughter was born to him, in 1132, he betrothed her—infant though she was—to Raymond-Bérenger of Barcelona. Then he returned to his cloister; and five years later—the Spring of this same year in which Cercamon came to Barcelona—Raymond-Bérenger was recognized as Prince of Aragon. But he took no measures to secure his power there, lest he arouse the enmity of the Templars and Hospitallers, who resented their own loss of the realm. Raymond du Puy, grand master of the Knights of the Hospital, sold Bérenger his claim for a round sum in gold; and the count held Aragon as good as his.

But now came the news that du Puy had broken his promises, and that the Temple and the Hospital had declared Aragon theirs by the terms of Alphonso's bequest. It was rumored that they had bought over the Aragonese barons, and purposed to maintain the independence of their land against Barcelona. None knew whence the rumor had come, but it spread through the court like a pestilent disease, spreading consternation, seizing on minds already disturbed by the tragedy of Gomez.

From the court it spread to the city; within three days all had heard it, all were speculating wildly on its direful meaning. Here was an ally for Navarre! So soon as Moncada fell in the combat with de l'Arba, Navarre would declare war, join forces with Aragon, and their united armies would advance to the siege of Barcelona. Such was the talk in the palace, in hall and antechamber, in the wine-shops, on the Rambla during the daily promenade.

And at this unpropitious time Andreu de Moncada resigned his office as captain-general into the count's hands, announcing his intention to proceed at once on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella, there to implore the saint's help in his approaching combat with the envoy of Navarre. He departed at once; and his going plunged the shaken city into consternation.

It was on Moncada's recommendation that city and army were placed under the command of his subordinate, Amat de Cascadour. Cascadour, like Cercamon, was a Gascon, exiled from Aquitaine; but

he had come to Barcelona many years before, and had proved his loyalty by serving in Raymond-Bérenger's wars with heroic courage and unsparing devotion. Now that suspicion was directed away from Aquitaine toward Aragon, none saw any peril in entrusting the city to him; the rather because Amat de Cascadour, driven from his home by Guilhem X of Aquitaine, had received no pardon from Guilhem's daughter Aliénor, the Queen-Duchess. He had risen rapidly in the count's service, distinguishing himself for both valor and energy.

Cascadour's first act after taking over Moncada's responsibilities was to send a force of a thousand men to guard the Aragonese border; and all praised his prompt energy. But Barcelona herself could not be weakened; every available

Catalan was already beneath her banners; and therefore the new captain-general sent agents into France to hire mercenaries. The plain of the Besós, where the city's garrison exercised, was bright with flashing armor and the rippling of banners.

The peril of war, and the excellence of the new commander, became the common talk of folk and court. Leaving the count's presence with two young Catalan knights, Cercamon's ears were ringing with the exciting news. But the two young men, friends and rivals for the next vacant captaincy, had of late become estranged over the unhappy affair of Gomez; and not even their common admiration for the indefatigable Cascadour could re-unite them. Thoma la Barca, believing in Lady Maria's guilt, praised the Gascon commander as a better man than Moncada; while Luc de Sobre Ter was confident that God would vindicate Maria's innocence, overthrow de l'Arba with Don Andreu's spear, and prove Mancada the first soldier of Barcelona.

"Bah!" cried young Thoma, with all the fledgling warrior's contempt for a man inferior in the lists. "Andreu? Cascadour would have eclipsed him within the year, even if we had never heard of de l'Arba! And now his wife must needs poison the Navarrese, de l'Arba will make her a widow by this day six weeks!"

Luc de Sobre Ter scowled blackly, and plucked at his soft mustache.

"If 'twere not for the count's order, Thoma, I would cut your comb for that!" he cried. "Andreu de Moncada has more worth in his little finger than all your ancestors had in all their carcasses together!"

Thoma's hand flew to his hilt.

"Order or no," he retorted, "you shall pay for this!"

Cercamon thrust his broad shoulders between them.

"One moment, messires!" he said with a cold smile. "I trust your disregard of the count's command conveys no want of respect for him, no lack of loyalty to your master?"

The shocked, angry faces of the youths convinced him that they were indeed loyal enough to Bérenger, however they might stand in the great quarrel that divided the sympathies of the court.

"Then," the troubadour added softly, "you may have heard that I have some small skill with my weapon. If one of you kills or wounds the other in this mad quarrel, I will kill the victor!"

Both knights turned on him hotly, but he gave them no time to speak.

"It is said," he resumed, "that there will be war with Navarre and Aragon. If that war comes, the count will need you both. At such a time it is treason to deprive your lord of loyal followers. Which of you is so faithless as to weaken his ranks by even a single arm, merely to satisfy a private spite?"

He watched the young men narrowly, and their looks satisfied him. He left them reconciled, and complimented himself with the certainty that he could rely on their help in the event that the plans seething in his brain called for execution.

THE excitement of the populace rose to fever heat during the week that followed. Ever unquiet, the common folk of Barcelona were now restless as dogs in August, and as ready to run wild. It was said openly in the wine-shops that King Garcia of Navarre had hired de l'Arba to compass the murder of Gomez, and by casting the blame on Lady Maria, to deprive the city of its great general.

No carter, no butcher's apprentice was too humble to assert full knowledge of the political peril, and to swear that it was Navarre which had bribed the Templars and Hospitallers to break with Barcelona. And hearing such words over and over again, Cercamon was amazed at the quick instinct of the mob-mind, which out of its loves and hates leaped to the conclusion concerning the murder which he had not reached until after his talk with Lady Maria.

But he did not agree with the folk that Navarre had hired the spears of the two great knightly orders. He knew well the tradition of stainless honor which the Temple and Hospital still proudly maintained; and he knew as well that Navarre was too poor to buy men whose vows set them above earthly wealth. Ambitious the Templars might be, the Hospitallers greedy for fame; but neither could be bought for gold.

Yet right or wrong, the people were dangerous. Convinced that Navarre was to blame for both the misfortune of their

beloved Moncadas and the new peril from Aragon, they had set their wills on taking vengeance if Moncada perished. Day after day brought closer the date set for the trial by combat; and with each passing night their nerves grew rawer, tauter with the strain.

When the fateful day came, they would be near the breaking-point, ready for revolt. If Moncada fell, they would rise in blind fury, and slay all that was noble, unless the authority of the count and the spears of the soldiers could hold them in check.

If Cercamon's profession of singer drew him to the palace, his soldier's instinct drew him by a stronger lodestone to the city walls. He soon saw that Raymond-Bérenger, through his new general, was taking every precaution against the impending war. Every day the engineers were overhauling siege-engines, directing the storage of pitch, oil, and fagots on the battlements. Sheaves of arrows and javelins and heaps of stones were stacked behind the merlons.

Every day and all day, from the crenellated towers, Cercamon could see divisions of foot or squadrons of horse maneuvering on the plain beyond the town. Great wains creaked up to the gates on their solid wooden wheels, laden with grain and wine; sheep and cattle were driven in, so that there might be plenty of meat in case Moncada's fall should hearten Navarre to renew the war.

And one day, in his survey of the walls, Cercamon met Amat de Cascadour face to face. They had not met before, save on that day of Gomez' death, when Cercamon had seen the red-cloaked officer in lizard mail taking orders from the count.

The soldiers were exultant at the hope of action. Weary to death of garrison duty, still keenly mindful of the booty won in the war with Navarre a year ago, they longed for a second brush with the enemy. But their eagerness was dashed by the knowledge that war would come only if their beloved Andreu fell before de l'Arba's lance.

The news had flown from the garrison of Montjuich to the city walls that Cercamon was a friend to their captain-general, that he was eager to save Moncada if he could; and wondrous tales were told of the cunning he had shown in the service of Aquitaine. The soldiers came to look upon him as the only possible deliverer, Moncada's and Barcelona's hope. Wherever he went among them, Cercamon was sure of a cordial hand-clasp, a pot of wine, and much wild speculation and idle gossip.

"I have heard," a captain of archers said one day, "in the wineshops, that the folk will rebel if de l'Arba wins. They purpose to seize him after the combat, hack him to pieces, march to the palace, and demand instant war with Navarre. I, for one, will not order my company to loose a string against them!"

"So I have heard from others," Cercamon replied. "It is bad talk. If Moncada dies, the count will need every man's loyalty. What will happen to Barcelona, if both people and troops mutiny?"

"Why, the count will be forced to obey people and troops!" the officer replied. "Think you we will let our Andreu perish unavenged?"

"My counsel is," Cercamon answered him, "that ye cease to think of rebellion, and see to it that every arm is ready, every point sharp, when Barcelona needs them. But it would do no hurt if you let me hear all talk on this matter that reaches your ears; and if ye know of any brave fellows who would risk a stroke or two for me——"

"Every man who wears steel in Barcelona—" the captain began.

"Not so. Where there are many men, there are many hearts, and some of them false. Watch your men carefully; note down the most faithful. I may find use for some of them before swords clash in the lists."

"You shall have the best!" the captain promised.

CERCAMON had scarce reached his lodging when he heard the clang of mailed feet on the stair. A soldier entered, looked cautiously over his shoulder, closed the door softly behind him. It was Jehan Bigot, the Toulousan engineer from Montjuich.

"There is treachery in the wind," he announced darkly.

Cercamon stared at him. "How?"

"Half of the garrison of the fort is ordered to the Aragonese border!"

"Well?"

"They are replaced with mercenaries

from Auvergne, Burgundy, Gascony, and Poitou."

"All this I have heard. War threatens with Aragon, and the border must be protected. But since the city must not be exposed, new troops must be brought in to defend it. The count has found, in the past, that he can trust mercenaries if he pays them enough."

"What if some other pays more than he?" the engineer retorted.

"You mean?"

"That it is dangerous to strip Montjuich—the citadel of Barcelona—of so many seasoned men, and to replace them with troops of untried loyalty. Moreover—wellnigh every *Catalan* has been sent to the border. The garrison is now nine-tenths foreigners—most of them subjects of Aquitaine!"

"You are foreigner—so am I—and we are both loyal to the count. May not these newcomers prove as good as we?"

Bigot smiled mysteriously.

"What think you of this, then? This morning I found a purse of gold in my arms-chest!"

Cercamon pondered.

"Have you noticed," he asked, "what these new levies look like?"

"Think you I have asses ears?" the Toulousan answered. "They are stout lads all, but there is a gleam in their eyes that I like not. They have come hither on mischief. And what means the purse in my chest, eh? Some one would buy me!"

"Aye," Cercamon meditated. "You come from a land that has long been at feud with Barcelona, and it is thought you may be willing to serve her enemies—for a price."

"So you are awake at last? Aye, I have my price, but not to bite the hand that feeds me! No gold will buy my faith to Andreu de Moncada!"

"If you are wise," the troubadour smiled, "you will keep the gold and say nothing. If more appears, or if any whisper treason in your ears, pretend to be ready for any offers—and tell me straightway!"

"But I am no traitor!"

"Assuredly not, good Jehan. But you are a prudent man, who would dissemble a little to learn the plans of him who would bribe you."

The engineer bit his lip. "I like not dirty gold, but you are wiser than I. I will do as you say, if it will help our little Andreu."

"I am not sure of that," the troubadour replied, "but I hope it may. What you tell me is indeed suspicious. It would have been more natural to send half as many Catalans away, with as many mercenaries, so that the new troops, both here and on the border, might be seasoned with loyalty by the old. Watch your companions closely, and seek to discover their thoughts. If any treachery is planned, I must know of it. I rely on you to discover it; to that end you must keep your ears open and your tongue smooth. Seem to assent to any treason—even the worst—and then bring me word. I promise that no harm shall come of it. And—let me see—seek me not here, lest you be watched, and our counsels discovered. I have ordered a suit of mail made at Anselmo the Weaponsmith's. He is an honest man, and lives in the Street of the Armorers, by the Long Quay. Seek me there, if you have news. I have taken quarters there, to mature my plans undisturbed; but I keep this lodging to deceive any who would spy on me. Any soldier can go to an armorer's without being suspected, therefore you can meet me safely. Ask for me under the name of Gualter the Apprentice, for such is my character at Anselmo's."

"You have a plan, then?" the soldier whispered eagerly. "You can save Andreu? There are still enough loyal hearts in Barcelona——"

"My plans are unformed yet," Cercamon replied, "for I know neither the enemy's plans nor whether there indeed be an enemy. But if I need an honest heart and a strong arm, I shall remember you, Jehan Bigot!"

The next morning Cercamon revisited the battlements to speak with the friendly captain of archers. The man was not there.

"Where is Captain Salvier?" he asked the nearest soldier.

"Ordered to the border at midnight last night," the man answered with a scowl. "All is not well in Barcelona, troubadour! A third of the troops have been sent from the walls, and foreigners have taken their places."

"Who gave the orders?"

"Who would give them? Amat de Cascadour, our new general!"

Cercamon came closer to him.

"Say naught of your suspicions," he whispered. "Whatever happens, take care that ye neither murmur nor talk too much among yourselves—but get word to me! This may mean treason; or it may only be the recklessness of a man unused to such high command."

And he gave the soldier the same instructions as to finding him that he had given to Bigot.

The question Cercamon had first asked himself concerning Gomez' murder was: to whose advantage was it that Gomez should die? To this question there had been no answer, till he had spoken with Lady Maria. His talk with the soldiers in Montjuich, and Maria's statement, had convinced him that the murder was merely the first step in a cunning game, designed to strike through Gomez at Moncada, through Moncada at Barcelona itself. And to whose advantage was it that Barcelona should be weakened by the death, at de l'Arba's hands, of Moncada? Plainly, the advantage of Navarre, which feared the little leader's generalship more than a thousand spears.

But now Cercamon was puzzled. It would surely also help Navarre that so many stanch Catalans had been withdrawn from the city to the border, so that the city was now protected very largely by mercenaries of doubtful loyalty. But that was only a transposition of forces; it was believed that Aragon was instigated to war by Navarre; and if the two hostile lands should strike together against Barcelona, it seemed folly to weaken Barcelona while strengthening the border. The enemy must pass the border before he could strike at the city.

Unless—unless Aragon was only Navarre's cats-paw, and Garcia intended to let his allies shatter their strength against a solid Catalan army, while his own Navarrese came through the passes of the Pyrenees to assail the city. Or—and this thought came to Cercamon as a thing too good for reason—unless the report of Aragon's hostility were false, designed by a cunning, hidden enemy to draw away the most faithful troops from the city, and replace them with hirelings in an enemy's pay.

But the news from Aragon had been confirmed by a breathless messenger to the count, who had straightway sent an embassy to the Grand Masters of the two great orders to inquire into the truth.

Moncada was gone on his pilgrimage; else Cercamon might have reported the situation to him. It would avail little to speak with Cascadour, the new commander; for it was he who had ordered the withdrawal. Cercamon was too proud to mention the matter to Raymond-Bérenger: for the count had forbidden him to report mere suspicions. He resolved to wait a little longer, to be vigilant. There were still five weeks to the day set for the trial by combat—time enough for the mysterious threads to unravel.

ANSELMO the Weaponsmith had his shop on a twisting lane named for his craft; and men who wanted the best Milanese mail went to him. His wares were so precious that only a hauberk of his dainty mesh cost more than full panoply elsewhere; but the men-at-arms of Barcelona, being better paid than most, visited him as often as the dice had run luckily. Cercamon had chosen wisely in making Anselmo's his secret rendezvous; as he said to Bigot, any soldier could come to the Italian armorer's without attracting suspicion; and Anselmo was devoted to Raymond-Bérenger.

To get to the dingy room Cercamon had hired of the Italian, one passed first through the stall—a booth open on to the street, flashing with polished mail and sharp-ground swords by day, shuttered with massy iron by night—and into a long shop with helms and hauberks on pegs along the walls and lance-heads littering the benches. An inner door—bolted against the public—led into an open court with a forge, and a second hearth under a wooden lean-to against the brick wall.

This court was backed by a higher wall with a gate, behind which was Anselmo's low, flat-roofed house. In one of its four rooms Cercamon passed each night from the first darkness till the end of the third watch. An armful of straw and a sheep's fell served as bed in case he chose to pass the night; there was no other furniture save a wide, rough bench, and an iron cresset for a torch.

Anselmo, a little, stooped man with scraggy, grizzled beard, was glad to serve Cercamon, who had paid him well for the

mail he had ordered, and now offered the noble sum of ten gold marks for the use of his room. He was a shrewd, silent man, this Lombard smith; he understood that he must not talk of his guest, who was accessible only to those who asked for Gualter the Apprentice.

In determining on this secrecy, Cercamon had been moved not only by a desire to keep his own doings under cover, but by the certainty that—if there were indeed any treason afoot in the garrison—any soldiers who were seen talking with him might well be among the next contingent sent to the border. For Cercamon was known by his black garb as a friend to the Moncadas, and hence to Barcelona; and he had been seen too often on the battlements not to have attracted observation.

If there were indeed any connection between Navarre, the murder of Gomez, and the shifting of troops from the city, then there were doubtless men, even of high position, within the walls whose business it was to prevent just such inquiries as Cercamon had been making. In his new retreat he was confident of seeing Bigot, and such others as he need see, without discovery.

Anselmo's shop rang with the jingle of mail and the clank of armored feet all day long; but at sundown he closed his doors to business. From that hour on he played doorkeeper to Cercamon, who had no visitor, however, till midnight of the second day after his arrival. Two hours after the second watch at the fort came off duty, a knock at the door of Cercamon's hiding-place announced Jehan Bigot.

The engineer's eyes were bright with excitement. After making sure that none was eavesdropping, he whispered—

"The garrison has been reenforced again!"

"How many?"

"Two hundred men more. The fort now has its full complement of four hundred and fifty, of whom but fifty are of the original force, and only three Catalans. I paused for a moment by the north wall to ask of a comrade how matters passed there, and learned that more than half the forces in the city are new-come mercenaries from France. Two thousand men have been sent to Aragon!"

Cercamon was startled. The new captain-general was indeed taking the fate of the city in his hands.

"These latest comers—what are they like?" he asked.

"Stalwart fellows, scarred with war. They bear themselves well; but they stick too close together for my liking." He paused, but it was plain that he had more to tell. After a pause well calculated for its dramatic effect, he resumed:

"Roger de Canfranc, Governor of Montjuich, has been placed under arrest. We are now commanded by a Breton captain of mercenaries."

"What make you of that?"

"Accusation was brought against Canfranc—who is Aragonese by birth—that he was plotting for Lady Maria's escape. Amat de Cascadour signed the order for his arrest. *Peste!* We of the fort have served under Canfranc for twenty years, and he is faithful as steel. Our new governor's first act was to degrade the last four sergeants left of the original garrison and fill their places with new men—Poitevins. I tell you, Barcelona is rank with treachery!"

Cercamon seemed to pay little heed, but he was indeed much stirred by this news. To put the last of the old garrison under men from Poitou—the heart of Aquitaine—was either madness or treason.

"Have you received any more gold?" he asked, with seeming indifference.

Bigot drew from under his cloak a heavy purse, and flung it into Cercamon's lap.

"This morning," he replied, "I found this in my chest. And tonight, just as I was setting out for this place, one brushed past me in the gate, and plucked at my sleeve. Remembering your counsel to keep ears open and mouth shut, I followed him. He led me this way, stopping at a tavern by the fishers' quarter. The wineshop was empty—doubtless designedly, for none disturbed us while we were there.

" 'Do you want more gold?' he whispered. His cloak was drawn over his face, and hid all that the nasal of his helmet left visible. I snatched the cloak from him, and pulled off his helmet before he could draw weapon. His knife was out the next moment, but I calmed him.

" 'You know my face, so I must know yours,' I told him. He was one of the new Poitevin officers. 'Yes,' I went on, 'I want more gold, and care not how 'tis earned, so it be full weight.'

"He stared at me, as if to read my

thoughts. At length he resolved to venture. 'You are a Toulousan,' he began.

" 'Aye,' said I, 'but under outlawry. If you can work out my pardon from the Count of Toulouse, as well as get me money, I will cut any throat in Barcelona for you.'

" 'You languish for home?' he leered at me. 'I grow old apace,' I answered, 'and the old always long to spend their last years in peace at home.'

"He ordered drink; we emptied the cups before he spoke further. Yet all the time he watched me, and I watched him.

" 'It might be done,' he says at last. 'I will speak to my master about it. In the mean time you shall have enough gold to buy a freehold in Toulouse, or to live in comfort in Barcelona for all your days.'

" 'What must I do?'

" 'Obey order,' he answers, 'whatever they may be. Remember, for a pardon and gold you will cut any throat in Barcelona—those were your words. Gold you shall have, and I think my master can get you the pardon. Obey orders—whatever you are told to do, do it like a soldier. That is all.'

" 'But I obey orders now,' I told him.

"He grinned at that. 'The orders that will come—very soon—' he says, 'are such as you never had before. They will come from your own officers. And now farewell; I must not be seen with you.' "

"And you came straight to me?" Cercamon asked.

"Not I—though you are well hidden here. I made a circuit, stopping at two more taverns; then dodged back hither through side-streets. If any were following me, they are lost by now."

"The game is plain," Cercamon mused aloud. "A large part of the faithful garrison has been drawn off; new and unknown men—good soldiers, but with no loyalty to Barcelona—are sent to replace them. Stanch officers are discredited, foreigners and mercenaries put in their stead. Any man who, like yourself, is too useful to send away, is bought. This will be done till the garrison is at least half-disloyal, including most of the officers. But that all this can be done under the very eye of Amat de Cascadour, aye, so openly that the count can not but hear of it—that baffles me. It is Navarre, of course; or Aquitaine—since so many of the new troops are Aquitanian mercenaries."

"Bah!" the engineer retorted. "It is none so baffling. The count leaves all to Cascadour, as he was wont to leave all to Moncada. Cascadour is a good enough soldier, but no commander. Whatever foes to Barcelona are at the bottom of this thing, they can easily befool him. But hold! I mind me that Cascadour is himself a Gascon! It is he who was entrusted with the defense of the city, and 'twas he who brought in the new men. What if he brought them—knowingly?"

"I have thought of that," Cercamon answered. "But I am not sure. He is not in favor in Aquitaine, and men say that his service here has ever been honorable. He may be a blind tool—I think him no knave."

"You are doubtless right," the engineer conceded. "But hark you! Go you to the count, and tell him all! Urge him to recall the faithful troops from the border, put back our old officers, and spurn the newcomers out of the gates!"

Cercamon shook his head.

"That is a good way to smash the plot, but not to catch the plotters. It leaves our main task unaccomplished: for if the hand of Navarre or of Aquitaine is concerned in this, that hand will not strike home till Moncada lies dead under de l'Arba's spear. We must save, not merely the city, but Moncada and his lady. Let the fruit bide on the tree till it ripens."

"Well and good, if it does not hang too long!"

"I will see to that. Now go, or you will be late. You can always find me here at this hour, or Anselmo will know where I am."

TWELVE more days passed. Each day Cercamon visited the palace, where talk of the Moncadas was now overshadowed by the new threat from the Great Orders in Aragon. The count's messengers had not returned; some said that they must have been intercepted. Most men declared openly that Garcia of Navarre had egged on the Templars and Hospitallers to dispute Bérenger's claim to the throne of Ramiro.

The young nobles, whose zeal for war made them see its lightnings near, were confident that Barcelona would have to stand a combined assault from the two western kingdoms at once.

The might and wealth of the Orders would swell Garcia's power to formidable proportions, and in Raymond du Puy, grand master of the Hospital, they would have a leader worthy of Moncada himself. And now, when Moncada's life hung on the issue of the approaching duel in the lists—

"The count himself is no mean soldier," Cercamon observed.

"He is strong as a bull, and a champion!" Thoma la Barca answered proudly. "But he has never yet marshaled his own host in battle, and how know we that he can pluck victory from the clouds like Moncada?"

Day by day the palace buzzed with excitement and hummed with energy. In every corridor men grouped together, whispering, with faces high with warlike hope or dark with foreboding. In the bowers, the ladies grew pale and anxious; glory was well enough for their golden-spurred husbands, but it was they who tasted the bitterness of war with none of its fiery joys.

Twice each day Raymond-Bérenger showed himself before his court, serene of face, apparently undisturbed by the clouds that threatened his ambition and his very coronet. But he spent most of the time in his chamber, receiving reports from the walls, hearing messengers, or closetted with Amat de Cascadour, Moncada's Gascon successor.

Every night Cercamon returned to his lodgings, just at sunset; well after dark he slipped out through the night-black byways to the house of Anselmo the Armorer. Every night Jehan Bigot came to him; on the fourth night the old soldier was swelling with importance.

"The walls have been reenforced again," he said abruptly. "Frenchmen all, I hear; mostly from Poitou!"

"Like him who gave you gold!" Cercamon exclaimed. "Now it is sure that Aliénor of Aquitaine strikes at Barcelona! That the new garrison is chiefly from Poitou or Gascony is a sure sign of her hand."

"Aye," growled the engineer, "and so is Amat de Cascadour a vassal of hers!"

"Not so—he is a vassal of our lord the count, and has been for twelve years. He has more to gain from loyalty than from treacherous service to the queen-duchess."

"I like not these Aquitanians," Bigot grumbled, "saving your presence, troubadour, for you are an honest man!"

"Mayhap I am," Cercamon answered, half to himself. "I have ever striven to act honorably and faithfully; but now it is an ill plight in which I find myself. Aliénor of Aquitaine is indeed sending these men, through some traitor in the count's confidence; and so I must play a strange part. For I myself was born her vassal, yet now I strive to the best of my might to defeat her purposes and aid her enemy. But, as I hope to save my soul, I can do no otherwise! For Raymond-Bérenger is as noble in heart as in birth; while Aliénor, duchess and queen though she be, is a tyrant and a Jezebel!"

"And your enemy," Bigot reminded him, "who has sworn your destruction. I, born a Toulousan, serve the greatest enemy Toulouse has. And one man out of every four in France today—if he follow the profession of arms—is in the service of some prince other than his own. 'Tis topsey-turvy, but 'tis the fashion—and a good one, for it saves some of us from a hempen collar."

Cercamon rose.

"Time you were going back," he said. "I think I will speak with Amat de Cascadour tomorrow."

Shortly after Bigot's departure, Cercamon put on his cloak and set out for his lodgings. He was weary, and the bed there was more tempting than the straw and sheepskin at Anselmo's. He had advanced perhaps a hundred yards up the Street of Armorers, and was about to turn into a by-lane leading west toward the Rambla, when his ear caught the faint *chink-chink* of steel on stone. Instantly he stopped, hand on sword; and the next second three men sprang upon him from the shadow of the corner house-wall.

His sudden stop saved his life. As they leaped in he stepped back, and their blades stabbed the air. Cercamon drew and thrust in one smooth motion, swifter than light. Not for nothing was he known for one of the first swordsmen in France. His blade licked in twice, and came back red. The foremost bravo fell sprawling, his throat spouting blood; the second gave back just in time to avoid the troubadour's point.

"Cut him down!" cried the third, and flung himself into the fight.

His weapon grating against two, Cercamon fought for life; his sword played fiercely back and forth with all his great strength centered in his supple wrist. A hot pain seared his temple; but his next thrust stretched a second adversary on the cobblestones. The third turned and ran, but Cercamon followed hard on his heels, and launched a mighty stroke at the fellow's head. The descending blade lost much of its force from the man's speed; but it fell true on the steel helmet, and the would-be murderer fell.

Cercamon thought at first that the man was dead; but feeling his head, discovered that the blow, having split the helmet, had been turned by a steel coif underneath. Sheathing his blade, Cercamon picked the stunned man up, threw him over his shoulder, and carried him back the short distance to Anselmo's shop.

In his dingy quarters back of the court, the troubadour laid the man out on his own couch, stripped off the coif, and bathed his head. The ruffian was a sturdy fellow of forty, scarred and dark-visaged. For a few moments he gave no sign of life, but at last he opened his eyes. By the light of the half-consumed torch he stared at Cercamon, as if uncertain of his sight; but his dazed senses gathered themselves, and he gasped in dismay.

"Cercamon!" he cried.

"And whom did you take me for, since you sought to murder me?" the troubadour answered grimly. "And who are you? Ha, now I remember! You are Gui le Balafré, captain of the guard in Poitiers!"

"You remember well," the soldier answered, with a wry smile. "*Peste*, but you deal hard blows! A good helmet spoiled, and a dint through plate and mail! Had I known it was you we were sent against, I should have bided at home rather than risk my skin in Barcelona."

Cercamon said nothing; but bolting the door on his captive, he crossed the court into Anselmo's shop. Soon he returned with a brace of new-made fetters, and clamped them on le Balafré's wrists and feet. Then, sitting down on the floor, he drew from the pouch at his girdle a thin roll of parchment, a reed pen, and a tiny vial of ink. While his captive craned his neck to watch, Cercamon slowly and carefully wrote out a dozen lines.

"What is that?" asked Balafré, his voice edged with fear.

In that day men who knew not the art of writing still saw something awful and magical in written characters.

"I am writing," Cercamon answered coolly, "a report to the Count of Barcelona. It says that you, with two others, sought to murder me, who am engaged on an important task at the count's orders; and it requests that you be tortured and broken on the wheel!"

Gui le Balafré went white.

"Before God, write no more!" he pleaded. "Destroy it! Have not you and I been comrades in arms, served together under the banner of Aquitaine? Have I not said that I would have lifted no hand against you had I known you? I guessed indeed that he whom I was to slay was a man of importance, else I, a Captain of Poitiers, would not have been set upon him; but how should I guess that it was your life my master sought?"

"Who is your master?" Cercamon countered. "You would best tell me the truth, or this paper shall go to the Count at daybreak."

"I will tell you all, only do not send that paper! You have ever been a gallant man, troubadour—you would not have a soldier tortured! I have faced death a hundred times, and could face it if it came swift and sure—but crushed limbs and shrieking nerves—have pity!"

"Why should I not send you to the rack and the wheel, you who would have murdered me by treachery?"

Gui's dark eyes watched his captor's face with a strange commingling of terror, admiration, and submission; but he saw no sign of mercy there. Love of life was strong within the soldier's powerful body.

"I will do as you bid," he repeated. "I will do all—serve you, obey you, follow you till death!"

Cercamon held the man's eyes with his own cold, blue-green stare.

"If I spare you," he answered slowly, "you will obey all my commands—all! Though riches, greatness, everything should be promised you by my enemies, you will obey me alone; else I will hunt you down and bring a bitter death upon you!"

"I know your sword, and I know your cunning," Balafré replied. "Not alone because I fear you, but also because—because

it is better to stand by your side than to bear the banner of a prince! But you must protect me, for if I change masters and serve you, Aquitaine will hunt me!"

MANY of the rough spearmen of Poitou had given their admiration to Cercamon the Troubadour. The French, whether rogues or heroes, ever honor gallantry. And Cercamon had proved, in battle, in the lists, in the snares of intrigue, that he was as brave as cunning, as honest as invincible. Therefore the men who once had served with him regarded him with half-frightened worship, as one who could not fail.

"Who is your master?" Cercamon asked again.

"Amat de Cascadour!"

Cercamon smiled grimly.

"Bigot was right, then. Go on."

"Cascadour sent orders to me, through the new governor of the fort, to kill the man with whom Bigot was in secret communication. It seems that Bigot, for all he has taken our gold, has been under suspicion. Spies dogged his tracks and followed him hither twice; each time, his confidant was seen to leave this place a little after him and to turn west. I was told that this man knew too much for the good of our cause, and therefore I was to take two men and slay him. Bigot is to be sent to the border in two days."

"A dainty game," Cercamon commented. "So Amat de Cascadour, who commands the forces of Barcelona, is in the pay of Aquitaine?"

"Aye. He has received secret couriers from the queen-duchess. I myself came hither with a message to him, which ordered me to place myself at his service. He detailed me to Montjuich. Thrice have I been sent to him from the fort for gold to be distributed among those who, like Bigot, seemed too useful to be sent away. It will hurt Cascadour to send off the best engineer in the garrison."

Cercamon pondered long. "So Aquitaine," he said at last, "having often sought to humble Barcelona, is to strike at last. Navarre is concerned in the game as well; but how? And what of Aragon?"

At the last word Balafré laughed.

"Your count is all too credulous. The threatened rebellion of the Great Orders against him is pure illusion—a cunning rumor spread by Aquitaine's agents, to draw off your best men to the border. Since the first messenger that reached Aragon from Bérenger would have learned the truth, Cascadour has laid ambushes to cut off and seize all messengers. It is not from Aragon that danger threatens—'tis from Barcelona itself! I am but a little pawn in the game, and know little of kings and castles; but I know that nine out of every ten men in Montjuich, and one out of every two on the walls, are Aquitainians, or mercenaries in Aquitaine's pay. I was among the first to come, and have been used as agent in getting others."

"But, *Mordieu!*" cried Cercamon. "Even with the city under the command of a traitor, how could two thousand spears be brought within the gates without arousing attention?"

"The threat of war—the fear of Aragon. Have you not heard yourself how Cascadour is praised for his energy in holding both city and border, and finding the necessary men in the shortest time? And how did he get those men? Why, they were waiting in the passes of the Pyrenees, ready to filter into the city by companies so soon as the fear of the bogy Aragon should have wrought upon the nerves of Barcelona. And every man of them hired to cut Barcelonan throats! The Queen-Duchess Aliénor detached most of them from her own forces in Poitou and Gascony. Cascadour had only to send away all Catalans, the most of the faithful mercenaries, and fill his garrison with the foes of Barcelona."

"But this is madness!" Cercamon objected. "You can not hold the city for a fortnight, once you have taken it. All Catalonia will rise against you! You do not know the richness, in men and money, of this land!"

"Navarre will take care of that!"

"Ha! What is Navarre's part?"

"Of that I know little, save that at one and the same moment her troops will invade your northwest border and Cascadour will strike in the city."

"When is that moment? Who gives the signal?"

Balafré shook his head.

"I know not. Navarre and Aquitaine plan to divide Catalonia between them; but when they will strike only Cascadour knows."

"And the murder of Gomez? The charge against Lady Maria?"

"I can not say. I had not so much as heard of it until I came hither."

Cercamon fixed him with his keen eyes, now smiling with cold menace.

"If you wish to live," he said, "if you wish a reward so great that nothing Aquitaine can give you will equal it, do as I bid you. If you fail me, may God have mercy on your wretched soul!"

Gui le Balafré held up his fettered hands.

"As I hope for divine grace," he swore, "I will obey your every wish!"

Cercamon unchained his wrists and feet.

"Go back to the fort," he ordered. "Report to Cascadour that you took up your post as he commanded, and fell upon me in the street. But say that I came sooner than you expected—on the very heels of Bigot. Say that I slew your two comrades, and that Bigot, hearing the alarm, came running back and helped you. Say that a stroke from my sword split your helmet just as Bigot ran his sword through my heart; that then you recognized me for Cercamon the Troubadour, and were frightened, knowing how perilous it is to kill one of my calling. You therefore tarried to cast my body into the river, while Bigot hastened back to the fort to be in time for his watch. That will account for your late return. But before you report, warn Bigot, that he may swear to your story. Do you understand? I wish it to be thought that I am dead. You can also spread the rumor in the town that I have been killed in a brawl."

"I will obey," Gui assured him. He thrust his two hands between Cercamon's. "I am your man till death! I know your cunning; I know how you can turn calamity into victory. Through you I will flourish, or through you perish!"

"That is true!" said Cercamon.

THAT night Cercamon spent at Anselmo's; the next morning early he roused the armorer.

"Get shears," he commanded, "and clip off my hair!"

Anselmo gaped at him.

"That beautiful hair!" he cried, "soft and long as a woman's!"

"Cut it off, and make haste!" the troubadour repeated. "And fetch the armor you have made for me."

Shrugging, the armorer obeyed; and Cercamon was shorn of the black locks that had been his pride. He made Anselmo crop him to the scalp; then, putting on undertunic and hose of fine, soft leather, he waited for the Italian to help him into his mail. Anselmo had done justice to his reputation: never was so fine a hauberk seen in Catalonia.

The meshes were tiny and soft, but so close-linked and highly tempered that they could defy the keenest blade. The helmet was ridged, and furnished with wide nasal and long cheek-curtains of close mesh. From Anselmo's stock the troubadour selected a shield that suited the strength of his left arm. Full-mailed, no one would have taken him for the courtly singer in silks; his figure was a soldier's, his features hidden by plate and mail over cheeks and nose.

The final payment for the mail—paid in gold marks of France, so eagerly sought in Barcelona for their good, full weight—almost emptied his purse of all that his songs had won for him. That which was left he counted out into Anselmo's palm.

"Now," he directed, "go out and buy me a pair of Spanish boots at the cordwainer's, and a surcoat with the badge of Barcelona. Also—if you have recently made a pair of gold spurs for some knight, lend them to me for a space."

"Gold spurs!" cried Anselmo in consternation. "But they are the badge of knighthood, and your excellence is not a knight! I entreat your forgiveness, but it will cost me my trade if men learn that I have lent a knight's gold spurs to a man of low birth!"

"Do as I bid, and I will see that you profit by it. And stay—you may hear on the streets that I am dead. If so, say nothing, but—show fear!"

The Italian took himself off; and bolting the door of his quarters, Cercamon sat down to wait. With parchment and pen he occupied his time till Anselmo returned, and knocked at his door. The armorer was frightened indeed. With shaking hands he delivered two parcels: a pair of soft, high-heeled Cordovan boots, fit for a prince to wear, and a surcoat of white wool embroidered with the arms of Barcelona. Then he fumbled in a wide drawer in his shop, his trembling fingers rousing echoes of tinkling metal, and returned with a pair of gold spurs, which he clasped upon the boots.

Cercamon laughed at his terror.

"What news?"

"The town seethes with the news of your murder," Anselmo replied unsteadily. "It is said you were slain in a brawl with certain soldiers, whose corpses were found but an arrow-flight from my shop. The watch are patrolling the streets. I was stopped and questioned thrice, and had to confess that you had lodged with me. It would not be well for your Excellence to venture forth till night."

"Yet that I shall, and right speedily," Cercamon answered. "For now that the watch know that I have been here, they will search the place."

He drew on the boots over his hose, put on the surcoat, and strode across the court.

The Italian stared after him in amazement. Used, in the way of trade, to measuring men's figures with his eye, he was startled to see that the Troubadour looked a good head taller than he had known him; then he realized that this was the effect of the high-heeled boots and the tall ridge on the helmet.

This was exactly the effect Cercamon had counted on. He had devised the ridge as a better protection against swordstrokes than that afforded by the ordinary uncrested helmet; and now it helped to disguise his stature. His shortness and the unusually wide spread of his shoulders made disguise difficult for him; but the additional six inches lent by heels and helmet not only made him seem a tall man, but even restored his huge shoulders and long arms to seemingly normal proportions. This, and the completeness with which nasal and cheek-pieces hid his features, made him unrecognizable. His blue-green eyes, so rare in one with hair so dark, he could not disguise; but the gold spurs, marking him for the knight he was not, might serve to distract attention from them.

The Watch being merely garrison troops detailed to keep order, Cercamon knew they were well leavened with traitors. As he came out into the sunshine of the street, he ran full into a squad of spearmen. At sight of a knight in fine armor, wearing the badge of the service, they checked; this was surely some officer, perhaps not of their faction. But Cercamon, blinking his eyes as if to keep out the sun, hailed them bluffly:

"There is none within but the armorer, lads!" he said. "And he knows no more than he told a few moments since. I will wager Gui told a true tale."

He spoke not in the refined Provencal which, as a poet, he used at court, but in the broadest Gascon—his native dialect, which he had not used since boyhood. As Gascony was a fief of Aquitaine, its tongue would serve to avert the suspicion of men smuggled into Barcelona's service by the queen-duchess. The result justified his expectation. The men raised their weapons in salute, and turned away from the shop. When they had disappeared, he went in again, and greeted the frightened Anselmo.

"Take these letters," he directed, "one to Thoma la Barca, and one to Luc de Sobre Ter, knights in attendance at the palace!"

And out to the street he strode once more.

AMAT DE CASCADOUR left the count's presence with a thin smile of satisfaction. All was flowing smoothly: the messengers sent to Aragon had not returned, and it was rumored that they were slain or held captive by the Great Orders. More than half the original garrison of Barcelona was on the Aragonese border, holding the castles against possible invasion. Of the force now within the city, nearly two thousand men were mercenaries, paid with Bérenger's gold, but twice bought by his enemies. Only a trifle more than fourteen hundred men of Moncada's old command were left within the wall. The count had no suspicion: he had but now sought Cascadour's advice concerning the wisdom of sending yet more men to the border. The Knights of the Temple and the Hospital were renowned fighters, and it would not be easy to resist them without a great host.

Cascadour had seemed unwilling to weaken the garrison further—too many men already were new and unused to their positions. He had cannily let the count press the point, and then promised to consider further. He was playing his game carefully, for he had much to win. Exiled from Aquitaine twelve years before, he had found in Barcelona asylum and favor, had risen rapidly by his soldierly courage, and won Raymond-Bérenger's confidence. But among the jealous Catalans, who liked not to see favors conferred on foreign adventurers, he had no hope of further advancement.

As deputy-general of the city during Moncada's absence—and as Moncada's successor if the latter perished at de l'Arba's hands—he stood at the crest of his career,

beyond which crest lay nothing better in store. He was still a simple knight, with no holdings of his own.

He had nursed his balked ambition till it had grown to a sore grievance—a grievance against the proud, envious Barcelonan nobles who blocked his advancement, and even against the count himself. To Cascadour, in this mood, had come the sudden offer of riches and power, of a future such as he had not dared dream of.

It at once tempted his greed and tickled his craving for revenge upon these Catalans, who would not let a man thrive by his sword unless he were of their own stock.

Aliénor of Aquitaine, the queen-duchess, in letters signed with her seal and delivered by a squire of her household, had offered him a free pardon of his ancient offense, large revenues, and a castle in Poitou if he would follow the instructions given him verbally by her messenger. Acting on these orders, he had used his high trust as temporary Captain-General of Barcelona to surround the city and its count with craftily-woven, invisible nets of intrigue. The queen's messenger had returned with his pledge to obey her instructions to the letter. And so far he had done so, adding nothing of his own—except to take measures against the life of Cercamon. Cercamon had already shown his partiality for the Moncadas both in his dress and in his conversation, and Cascadour's spies had reported him as perilously familiar with certain soldiers of the garrison.

Cascadour himself had scarcely seen Cercamon, but he knew his repute for cunning, and cared little to have so dangerous an antagonist alive. Besides, it was said that the queen-duchess would pay well for Cercamon's destruction.

One of the officers with whom the troubadour had been friendly had been sent to the border; another, Jehan Bigot, was retained only when his readiness to take gold and his reported share in Cercamon's murder were assured. Now Cascadour's spies declared that no man in the city had the least suspicion of their master. There was but three weeks left before his task should be complete, and the moment come to strike.

Returning to his own quarters in the north wing of the palace, Sir Amat opened a huge cabinet sunk in the wall, and took out a sheaf of records. Swordsman and intriguer, he was something yet more perilous—a scholar. In his cunning youth he had perceived the advantage of being his own clerk, and had hired a learned priest to teach him.

His exile from Aquitaine had come about through the treachery of a squire who also could read, and who spied on his master's manuscripts. From that time on, Cascadour had permitted none about him who could decipher a single letter—and he kept the key of his cabinet in his own pouch.

On the wide table of polished olivewood he laid out a roll of parchment, spreading it with his strong, fine hands. It was written in his own small, clerkly style: a full inventory of the garrison—men-at-arms' names in black, officers' in red. Wall by wall, tower by tower they were listed, Montjuich fort separately. Thirty-four hundred names, of which fourteen hundred were pricked out with little blue dots.

"We have enough," he muttered, glancing up to make certain that he had not forgotten to bolt the door. "We have enough; yet it might be well to send away a few hundred more. Surprize, and the capture of the count's person, should save the spilling of overmuch blood—but it can do no hurt to make sure. And the count——"

A knock at the door startled him. He thrust the manuscript under a plan of the fortifications; then, skilfully composing his features, he rose swiftly and flung back the bolt.

A man-at-arms—a life-long follower of Cascadour's fortunes—stood in the entrance.

"A knight, Sir Amat, who will not disclose his name. He has important matters for your Excellency's knowledge."

Amat made a gesture of assent, and the soldier ushered in a strongly made man of middle height, clad in mail from top to toe. The stranger seemed, by his finely-textured armor, to be of wealth and position; his gold spurs assured his knighthood. In a voice thick with blurred Gascon consonants, he uttered a polite greeting, and cast a wary glance over his shoulder.

His dialect alone was somewhat of a reassurance to the newly startled deputy-general. The glance of caution showed that his business must be delicate. A master-swordsman himself, utterly fearless, Cascadour did not hesitate to admit his visitor and bolt the door behind him.

As soon as he had done so, the stranger—who stood well out of the narrow stream of sunlight from the solitary arrow-slit in the

thick wall—drew from his mantle a roll of parchment, and handed it to Cascadour with a bow.

Amat glanced at the seal, then he hesitated.

"I have not seen your face," he hinted, "and do not know your name."

"I am from Aquitaine," the other answered. "My name and face are too well-known to be shown in this city—even to you—with safety. My master is he whose seal lies in your hand."

A conspirator himself, Cascadour hated secrecy. He was about to answer angrily, when a second glance at the seal checked him. It was that of Bertrand d'Armagnac, grand seneschal of Aquitaine, and most trusted officer of the Queen-Duchess Aliénor.

"You come from her Majesty?" he asked.

"When I left Poitou, I came straight from her Majesty's presence," the stranger answered. "And I have full authority to act in Barcelona according to my discretion. But—though her Majesty trusts you—it has seemed well that you should know neither my face nor name. If any heard of me, your plans might be ruined through the need for premature action."

"You wear the badge of Barcelona," Cascadour commented.

"Of necessity. What armed man, in these anxious days, would be permitted to enter Barcelona without its badge?"

Convinced that he was speaking with a man of eminence in the queen-duchess' service, Cascadour drew up for him a deep, round-backed chair, then bit his lip as the man turned the chair so that the light did not fall on his eyes and mouth—which were all that his helmet left visible. Amat himself drew close to the embrasure, to get the light on the letter, which he unrolled and read carefully. His cheeks flushed with satisfaction, but he was not too exultant to cast a second glance at the date of the letter.

"To judge," he said coldly, "from the day on which my lord of Armagnac signed this letter, you have ridden hither all too slowly for one who bears me such important news."

The Gascon drew himself up proudly, and his retort was haughty. "Let me remind your excellence that the Count of Armagnac is the queen-duchess's grand seneschal, and that I, his friend and messenger, have other errands quite as weighty as bearing despatches to you!"

Cascadour hastened to apologize.

"I might have known," he said humbly, "that no small man would ride on such business." And to himself he added, "Surely a noble high in her Majesty's grace, else he would not be so insolent."

"I have been in Barcelona for some tmie," the stranger resumed. "It was part of my instructions to observe the measures you have taken, that I might assure my master of their sufficiency. It is for this reason I have not come to you sooner."

Amat concealed his anger. So those who had bought him did not trust him, but set spies on him! So far he had revealed nothing to this arrogant messenger; but now he must justify himself.

"I trust," he replied silkily, "that you have been pleased?"

The stranger nodded slowly.

"There is but one thing I find amiss," he said. "The queen-duchess has lent you many of her own good men-at-arms, and it were well that as few of them as possible should perish in this business. You have not sent away enough of the count's men."

Cascadour gulped in relief. Since the stranger knew so much, he was certainly in the very heart of the conspiracy, and could be trusted.

"I have thought of that myself," Amat rejoined, "and but now I have lured the count into giving me authorization to do so."

"That is well," the other commended. "But one thing more: you were too credulous in the matter of Cercamon's death. How do you know that he was slain?"

"I have the word of Gui le Balafré that the troubadour perished by the hand of a Toulousan named——"

"Named Jehan Bigot. Aye, I know all, and more than you suppose. But how know you that Balafré and Bigot speak the truth?"

"You must know, my lord—"Amat answered, giving the title because the messenger's tone was such as only a noble would dare assume—"you must know, being yourself in the Count of Armagnac's household, that Balafré is a trusty man. He had been——"

"Has been captain of the guard in Poitiers for many years? Aye, true. But the tale he tells has its weaknesses. Your spies tracked Cercamon from his lodgings to a shop in the Street of the Armorers, and followed

Bigot to that street. You commissioned Balafré and two others to kill Cercamon as he left after consulting with Bigot. Now I ask leave to point out two suspicious details. Since Bigot was in Cercamon's confidence, is it likely he would kill the troubadour? I foresee you will reply that you had bought Bigot with your gold. Aye, but it was Balafré that dispensed that gold, as it was Balafré who swears that Bigot killed Cercamon. Now for the second point; if Cercamon was slain, why did not his slayers bring you his head, instead of reporting that they threw his body in the river? What if Bigot and Balafré are in league with Cercamon?"

Cascadour twisted uncomfortably in his chair. He had not often made mistakes, and did not like to be caught in one. And this messenger, who had confessedly been watching him, knew too much. Moreover, that the stranger knew Cascadour's part in Cercamon's murder troubled him greatly. Cascadour had carefully spread the report that the troubadour had died in a street brawl. In France, and not less in Barcelona, it was a grievous crime to slay a troubadour. If Cercamon were indeed dead, and it should come out that Cascadour had ordered his murder, then Cascadour would be cut to pieces by the infuriated nobles, or broken on the wheel by the count's order.

The messenger understood his fears.

"I shall say no word," he hastened to make assurance, "of your part in this matter. But between ourselves I would remind you that the queen-duchess will add materially to your reward if it turn out that Cercamon is slain. There is ancient enmity between them. But you should have taken more pains to make sure. If Cercamon lives, he may make grave trouble for us. I have learned that he knew more of our enterprise than is safe for the queen-duchess' plans—or for you."

"What would you have me do?" Cascadour asked uneasily.

"First, send away five hundred more of the Barcelonan troops who still remain in the city. Put them under the command of Balafré and Bigot—who, if untrustworthy, will then be out of your way—and send them to reenforce the garrisons on the Aragonese border. That will leave but a handful to oppose your host of mercenaries—perhaps nine hundred?"

"Nine hundred and forty," Amat corrected, happy at last to find a detail of his plans that the Gascon did not know.

"Give command over the last nine hundred and forty to Thoma la Barca——"

"But," protested Cascadour, "la Barca is not one of us!"

"True. He is known to be faithful to the count. So much the better; if all the loyal forces are sent off, and no troops remain under officers known to be devoted to Barcelona, suspicion will arise. This handful, under la Barca, can easily be enveloped by your greater numbers. Now let me see your dispositions for the final stroke."

"I have no orders to confide—" Amat began; but the messenger cut him short impatiently.

"If you had read well the letter which I brought you, you would know better than to dispute me!" he cried.

Cascadour once more glanced at the message. Opening with warm praise for his efforts on Aquitaine's behalf, it went on to introduce the bearer:

> A man high in our confidence, who must be nameless until our triumph. You are to follow such instructions as he may give you. Rest assured of her Majesty's gratitude, and of high reward.
>
> B. de A.

The signature and seal were those of Bertrand d'Armagnac.

Had Cascadour known d'Armagnac better, he might have hesitated; but having no honor himself, he could not know that such intrigues as his had never seen countenanced by Armagnac, and that the queen-duchess had always to choose other instruments for her less honorable designs.

"I will obey, my lord," Cascadour agreed. "You shall see my dispositions, which are carefully mapped. I am sure of your approval."

He unlocked the wardrobe again, took down a beautifully drawn plan and spread it flat on the table.

"Here," he explained, "are the lists; yonder will be Moncada's pavilion; from this tent will de l'Arba enter for the trial by combat. Here is the count's seat, with such and such guards about him."

He pointed out various troop-positions, while the Gascon knight watched closely.

The latter cut into his explanations.

"You are safeguarding our interests?" he asked. "It is not wise to trust Navarre too far."

Cascadour smiled. "These," he said, drawing from under his papers a plan of Barcelona's fortifications, "go to de l'Arba before he leaves Navarre. He will be followed, at two days' interval, by the Navarrese army. I stipulated for the two days.

"We shall have the count in our hands, and will hold Montjuich and the gates in the teeth of the populace till the Navarrese arrive; then, with Raymond-Bérenger in chains, we sail for Bordeaux. De l'Arba will then take possession of the city; but with the count as a hostage, we can force the nobles of Catalonia and Bérenger himself to cede Aragon to Aquitaine. If Navarre cheats us, we have all France behind us—seeing that the duchess is now queen."

"It is well arranged," the messenger complimented him. "I foresee a vicomte's title for you. And now farewell; delay not in sending Bigot and Balafré, with five hundred of the Catalans, to the border. And keep a vigilant eye on the city; I would not have that meddler Cercamon appear alive. He knows too much—he knows you are in our pay!"

TWO hours before midnight that same day, the west gate of Barcelona opened to pass out a little army—five hundred of the last true men in the garrison of Barcelona. It was very dark, and sultry; the torches of the guard shone hot on their mail as they passed through the vaulted gateway. The guard saluted with clanging weapons; the ranks replied, the movement of their arms sending little runlets of sweat a-trickling under their armor. Then they were gone, into the dark plain; one hundred mounted spearmen, as many archers, and three hundred foot.

The officer of the guard signed for the closing of the gate; but a last pair of riders checked him.

"Hold!" cried one of them. "I tarry but to receive last orders from Sir Amat de Cascadour!" The gate remained open for him; and he continued to talk to his companion, in tones too low for the guard to hear.

"And I make no doubt they will listen," he concluded. "Verily, you are a devil for cunning."

"I am devil enough to take your life if you fail!" the other answered. "If you do not convince them, Barcelona falls! Farewell, and—God help you, Gui le Balafré!"

ANSELMO the Armorer had promptly set off to the palace, as Cercamon had bidden him. But being a prudent and timid man, he had contented himself with entrusting to a page the troubadour's letters to la Barca and Sobre Ter, and had then run back to his shop as fast as he could. Had he not been questioned thrice by the watch? And should he risk calling public attention to himself now by tarrying at the gates of the court? Better men than he had died for interfering in the quarrels of the great.

But he had not been an hour at his forge when the clatter of hoofs rang in the narrow Street of the Armorers, and stopped at his very door. Loud voices sounded in his shop, calling his name impatiently. Before he could take off his leather apron two young men ran into the court, their fine garments disheveled with fast riding, their faces red with exertion and excitement.

"Where is he?" they cried with one voice.

Anselmo gaped at them, too frightened to answer. One seized him by the arm, while another produced a crumpled parchment and held it under his nose. But Anselmo, though he stared fascinated at the parchment, could not read.

"If my lords will deign to explain—" he stammered.

One of the young courtiers, catching sight of the gate in the rear wall of the court, pointed it out to his companion, who straightway dragged the trembling Lombard toward it. Anselmo did not dare cry out nor resist, but suffered himself to be dragged to the door of his house and thrust within, whither his captors followed him. Once the door was shut, they turned on him, and asked together, breathlessly—

"Where is Cercamon?"

The armorer glanced from one to the other in desperation. He did not know these men, nor whether they were friends or enemies to the troubadour; and he remembered that Cercamon wished all Barcelona to believe him dead.

"Indeed, my lords, he is slain!" Anselmo gasped out.

"Liar!" cried one of his persecutors. "Did he not send me this letter, signed with his own hand, but this very morning? And

does he not say here that he sent it by your hand?"

Anselmo began to understand.

"Ye are my lords la Barca and Sobre Ter?" he gasped.

"We are! Now speak—where is he?"

"Alas, my lords, I know not! He went away three hours since, leaving these letters for you. Nay, how should I know whether he will come back?"

Thoma la Barca and Luc de Sobre Ter gazed at each other in dismay. Sobre Ter was the first to speak.

"We must wait, then, as he bids us," he said. "But, by St. Andreu de Palomar! It is ill waiting at such a time!"

"Aye," la Barca answered. "But we know nothing more than Cercamon has told us, and can do nothing till he tells us more. He says in these letters that he will meet us here when he has need of us."

Sobre Ter, quicker to take heat than his friend, was also quicker to cool.

"Think you it can indeed be so ill as he says?" he asked.

La Barca nodded thoughtfully.

"Cercamon is known for the shrewdest of men, and is not one to be frightened by trifles. Likewise I am sure that he is to be trusted, for the count was furious at the report of his death."

"Then we will do as he bids us. Hark you, Anselmo! Every day, at noon and at sunset, one of us will send his squire or his groom to you. If Cercamon comes, and desires our presence, you have but to say to our messenger, 'The hour has come.' No more, do you understand? Do not speak Cercamon's name save to us, for he has too many foes in Barcelona."

"That was well said," a voice sounded behind them. All turned on the instant. The door had been softly opened, and in its archway stood a man in full armor.

Sobre Ter's sword flashed from its sheath; but the newcomer, removing his helmet, laughed at him. It was Cercamon.

"You have done well, Anselmo," the troubadour smiled. "You may get back to your forge, while these lords and I speak together. Follow me, sirs."

And he led the way to his room, where he stripped off his mail with a sigh of relief.

"*Pardieu, messires!* It is hot, and I am like to faint with all this iron on my back! I have just come from sweet converse with the arch-traitor, Amat de Cascadour."

"Cascadour!" the youths exclaimed.

"That astonishes you? Did I not say in my letters to you that the safety of Barcelona was threatened by traitors in high place? Aye, it was Cascadour who plotted my murder, and it is Cascadour who takes bribes from Aquitaine to seize the count's person and divide his lands with Navarre."

"Splendor of God!" swore la Barca. "And you have been to him, and come back alive?"

"Cascadour! A traitor!" repeated the confounded Sobre Ter, unable to comprehend such a monstrous thing.

"Aye," Cercamon assured them. "It is even as I tell you; I have it from his own lips."

"Nay, this passes belief!" cried Sobre Ter. "You say that Cascadour, the most trusted man in Barcelona, after Moncada, plots to sell the count to his enemies; you tell us that Cascadour hired assassins to slay you; and yet you tell us that he confessed his guilt to you! Why, if he were indeed the devil you paint him, he would have bidden his men-at-arms cut you to ribbons, rather than confide in you!"

Smiling at their amazed unbelief, Cercamon placed his helmet once more on his head, and faced them.

"Would ye two know me, with my face thus masked, armor on my body, and six inches added to my stature?" he asked. "Moreover, I went to him with the best of passports—a letter from Aquitaine!"

"From Aquitaine!"

"Aye, writ with my own hand, signed with the initials of Bertrand d'Armagnac—also in my hand—and sealed with his seal. You know that I was once in Armagnac's service. Many a letter have I sealed for him, and it was easy to make a lifelike drawing of his crest. A Jew in the Moorish quarter, who traffics in cut gems, made the seal for me. Behold it!"

He threw down on the table a beautifully cut jasper seal.

"Thus," he resumed. "I came before the traitor, in the person of a messenger from Aquitaine. I knew just enough—from one of his underlings whom I won over—to deceive him, and to lure him into telling me more. On a day already fixed the garrison of Barcelona will revolt, seize the count's person, and overthrow the liberties of all Catalonia. Two days later, a Navarrese

army will occupy the city, while the count is carried in chains to Aquitaine!"

"Cascadour, whom the count has heaped with honors!" murmured Sobre Ter, his honest young soul shaken to its depths by such treachery.

But the more practical la Barca turned to Cercamon with the question—

"When is this day?"

"The day," Cercamon replied slowly, "when de l'Arba overthrows Moncada in the lists!"

"Ha!" cried Sobre Ter. "I knew that snake from Navarre would sting! Then this plot is his contrivance?"

"So I guess," the troubadour replied. "It was he who poisoned Gomez, partly to secure his estates, but chiefly to ruin the Moncadas. If he is permitted to meet Moncada in the trial by combat, he will win; and I know that the time of the combat is also the time fixed for the attempt against the count. I told you in my letters that all the faithful troops of the garrison had been replaced—save a mere handful—by hirelings. It is by these foreigners, in the pay of Aquitaine, that the count will be surrounded when he takes his place in the seat of honor, to preside over the combat between de l'Arba and Moncada. He believes them faithful to him; yet they but wait for the signal to seize him. Their comrades on the walls will hold the city for Aquitaine, while those in the fort hold open a way of retreat for the traitors in case the plot does not fully succeed."

"And the signal?"

Cercamon glanced approvingly at la Barca.

"Wisely asked," he answered. "I do not know—I dared not ask Cascadour. But I think the signal for the outbreak will be given by de l'Arba's lance, when it tears through Moncada's breast."

"But if Moncada wins? There is a just God in heaven!" Sobre Ter cried out.

"The fate of Barcelona must not depend on one man's hand!" the troubadour retorted.

La Barca nodded.

"Then we must report this to the count!" he said.

"Not so. It is too late. What can the count do, but order Cascadour's arrest? And who will arrest him? The traitors in the army outnumber the true men three to one. The moment the count tries to act, the plot will come to a premature head, and he will be taken prisoner—perhaps slain!"

"Ah, troubadour!" exclaimed Sobre Ter. "You should have warned our lord in time!"

"I had not proof enough till now; and now the time has passed. But, as I learned more and more of the traitors' plans, I contrived a counter-plot. It can not fail—if ye two will help me."

Overwhelmed by the revelation of the odds against them, Luc de Sobre Ter covered his face with his hands.

"Too late!" he groaned. "What can we do—three, against thousands of veteran soldiers, the whole city in the hands of a cunning and desperate traitor?"

Once more Cercamon smiled, and turned to la Barca.

"We are not three," he said, "but more than nine hundred. I have secured from Cascadour the command of the last remaining faithful troops for you, my friend. With these nine hundred and forty spears we can do much, if they are well used."

"Well done!" la Barca answered. "Give me your orders, and I will obey!"

As Cercamon had foreseen, Sobre Ter's high spirit revived at this appeal to his companion, and his pride stirred.

"What have you for me to do?" he asked.

"You," Cercamon replied, "are from the country north of Ter, where the peasants are said to be hardy folk, loyal, and brave. Can you raise four hundred spears?"

Luc's eyes gleamed.

"I will set out for my home this day!" he promised. "My father commands sixty men-at-arms; his elder brother will lend me two hundred. From among our vassals I can find two hundred more—men who can ride and use lance and sword, men trained in the wars with Seville and Navarre. The time is short, but I can promise you close on five hundred fighting men in time to strike a blow for Barcelona!"

"Then we shall win!" Cercamon exulted. "I have already made provision for the return of our faithful troops from the border. While you, Sobre Ter, are recruiting your forces, la Barca shall be provided with means to get them into the city. The trial by combat is fixed for the Day of the Magdalen: you and your five hundred must be on the further slope of Tibidabo—where they will be hidden by the mountain from the city—by midnight of the day before. Remain there till a messenger from la Barca

brings you orders. When does Moncada return from his pilgrimage to St. James' shrine?"

"He should be here within a fortnight," la Barca answered.

"Good. I will see to it that de l'Arba does not slay him. Is all understood?"

"I am to get orders to Luc," la Barca repeated. "But how shall I know what orders to send?"

"You are subject to Cascadour's commands," Cercamon replied. "In my rôle of secret messenger from Aquitaine I can persuade him to give you orders that will help our cause. When the time comes, I will tell you what to do. But come hither no more—I will get word to you."

"In Heaven's name, do not fail!" urged Sobre Ter.

"I will not—if you will lend me ten gold marks to live on till the Magdalen's day. And the count must still think me dead!"

THE Day of the Magdalen dawned hot and sultry, and a brazen sun rose in a windless sky. For two days and nights the clatter of hammers had rung from the plain of the Besós; now that they were stilled, an ill-boding structure loomed between river and town. A huge oval of wooden stakes formed a stout palisade, within which rose deal stands like those of an amphitheatre: at one inner end of the oval stood a flattened pyramid of fagots. Above the amphitheatre a canopy of sailcloth was stretched, to keep out the direct rays of the sun; but it only shut in and intensified their heat.

There was a wide gate in the palisade; and to this gate, even with the dawn, a multitude of folk streamed. Some rode, in gay clothes and preceded and followed by men-at-arms; but by far the most thronged up on foot in clothes of black. And every black-garbed man, in spite of the awful heat, wore coat or cape, as if to conceal something unlawful under its folds. Women were there too, from the dainty ladies of the court on their mincing Moorish palfries to grim-lipped burgesses' wives and hard-faced fisherwomen from the port. Like their men, the women-folk of the people came with bitter looks and clenched hands; and now and again, as the cloak of one fell apart, something bulked beneath like a bag of stones.

They scowled and muttered as the fine folk from the palace rode by them; and many a man-at-arms, forcing a way through the crowd with his lance-butt, received a look that chilled the blood in his veins. Yet no hand was raised, however roughly the mailed men elbowed the mob aside to make room for knights and ladies. All, as with one purpose, streamed steadily toward the gate in the palisade—silently, menacing with their set purpose, but as yet peaceful. The smell of trampled grass and sweating bodies rose in the still heat.

Now the forefront of the procession reached the gate, and stopped. For the last hundred yards they had been crowding forward between straight ranks of massed men-at-arms, whose pikes were lowered. At sight of the menacing steel, the common folk growled deep, like angry dogs; yet they pressed on. But the gateway was filled with archers, arrow on string; and behind the archers were mounted spearmen.

"Back, ye scum!" shouted an officer. "None enters here save well-born folk!"

His accent was that of Poitou; and as they heard the hated dialect, the Barcelonans' bitter calm broke. Their growls became shouts of rage; hands came out from under cloaks, brandishing stones, clubs, knives.

"We will see our Andreu fight!" a voice cried from among them. "And, by the mass! If he falls, we will avenge his blood!"

A roar of approval followed the words, and the tight-packed crowd surged, swayed, and strove to push forward.

"Draw string!" cried the officer; and every bowman, advancing one foot, drew back his shaft.

The mob paused, irresolute; and in that moment the massed foot on one side of them extended their lances—gently, so that the points just pricked through to the skin. Simultaneously the opposite rank opened, leaving a wide breach; and, driven by the menace of the lowered spears, the folk, muttering, turned instinctively toward the breach. Again the ranks behind them thrust, gently, barely drawing blood; and the mob came to its senses. There was death in front, death behind; and before them an open way to safety.

"Through, good folk!" cried a voice by the breach. "I will vouch for our little Andreu's safety! Ye do him no good by periling your own lives. Better avenge him afterward, if need be, than die vainly now!"

Every eye was turned to the speaker, a tall officer on a gray horse. His helmet masked his features, but his voice was Catalan; and on his shield was the device of Sobre Ter. Half-convinced, half-afraid, the mob began to trickle through the breach. Those behind strained forward; and the terrific pressure and the heat together drained from them the last of their spirit. At last they were through; the soldiers closed ranks behind them again. The mob was baffled, revolution stayed.

And now the fine folk had a free way to the lists. On they came, shielded from the mob by the screen of soldiers—knights and ladies riding together in festal dress as to a feast. Yet they, too, rode silently; there was no festival in their hearts. Maria de Moncada might be guilty or no; but it would be a grim sight to see her burn on yonder pyramid of wood, if her husband should fail to prove her innocent with his sword. And brave as would be the spectacle of two champions clashing together in the lists, the champion of Barcelona was foredoomed. But festal dress all of the court must wear, to honor the solemnity of the event. It was an ordeal, in which God was expected to grant triumph to the right.

Two hours before noon the great gates were closed. Every seat of the wooden amphitheater was filled, its sides gay with massed color. In the middle of the south side, close to the lists, was a raised platform, its seats provided with comfortable backs and piled with soft cushions. Here, among his greatest nobles, sat Raymond-Bérenger.

On either side of him stood heralds, their mailed breasts covered with satin surcoats blazoned with his crest, their trumpets of silver in their gloved hands. Just below him on the trampled grass, a bodyguard of fivescore soldiers was drawn up. To his right, between the royal dais and the gate, four hundred spearmen waited at attention. These were the only soldiers within the palisade; but as many more waited without, supported by two hundred archers, to discourage further insolence from the mob.

Just in front of the pyramid of fagots, at one end of the tilting course, was a wide tent; and another stood at the opposite end. Between these two stretched a wide expanse of bare, hard ground, thinly covered with sand. Each tent gave on this earthen course through a doorway with a flap of silk, before which stood a mailed squire. The spectators, knights and ladies all, gazed intently at these silken screens, which would soon be withdrawn to let the champions ride into the lists.

Raymond-Bérenger sat silent and bitter in his chair of state. For him, more than for any other, this was a day of grim foreboding. He had visited Lady Maria in her prison, the day before, and had found her filled with a lofty spirit which he could not understand. Some vision seemed to have been vouchsafed her, for the prospect of her husband's fall and a dreadful death had lost its terrors.

She appeared sustained by a certainty of victory, of vindication. He had gone to Moncada's villa, and had found the little soldier upborne by the comfort he had found in prayer at the holy sanctuary of St. James, confident in the righteousness of his cause, and joyously eager for the combat.

These hopes, this exaltation, the count could not share. He loved Moncada, and honored Lady Maria; and he could scarce bear the thought that de l'Arba's terrible sword should compass their ruin. His was not the faith that works or receives miracles. He could but foresee the death of his two most beloved subjects, and the peril that Moncada's fall must bring upon his realm.

It made Bérenger's cup more bitter to reflect that he could have avoided all this ruin, if he had had the courage to prevent the trial by combat. He might have refused, might have insisted on Maria's innocence. Yet he knew well that such a course would not only have brought on him the charge of injustice, but would have earned both for him and for Moncada the charge of cowardice, the scorn and detestation of Church and nobles.

He had relied on Cercamon's renowned cunning to find some escape; but Cercamon was dead, slain in a brawl. All the troubadour's shrewdness had not availed to save himself. It had been madness to count so heavily on him.

Unable to endure the suspense longer the count signed to his heralds. These raised their silver trumpets, and blew a long, clear note. Two men-at-arms appeared, leading between them a tall, slender woman, robed in a single loose, white garment. Her hair was unbound, her feet bare, as the law prescribed. In her white

hands she clasped a crucifix. Behind her walked a priest, his eyes downcast. Slowly they led her to the dais, into the very presence of the count. All turned to gaze upon her, and a deep, prolonged sigh rose from the multitude.

Raymond-Bérenger rose.

"Read the charge!" he commanded his heralds.

One of them unrolled a scroll, and read in a voice that echoed through the arena like the voice of judgment:

"Whereas, accusation having been laid against the Lady Maria de Moncada, subject of this realm, that she did falsely and traitorously murder by the ministration of poison the squire Hilario Gomez of Navarre, vassal to the noble knight and Viscount Perez de l'Arba, also of Navarre, the said accusation hath been upborne by the said Perez de l'Arba,

"And, whereas the noble knight and Viscount Andreu de Moncada, vassal and captain-general of Moncada, and husband to the aforenamed Lady Maria, hath brought charge of falsehood against the said Perez de l'Arba, and denies his accusation,

"And, both these good knights having declared their readiness to maintain their contentions on peril of their bodies,

"It is hereby commanded that they shall fight together in the lists till one of them be overcome, that thereby the judgment of God, to which they have appealed, may be manifested between them.

"If Almighty God shall grant victory to the accuser, Don Perez de l'Arba, then shall the aforenamed Lady Maria de Moncada be forthwith burned at the stake, in punishment for the foul crime of which such victory shall be deemed to have proved her guilty;

"But if God send victory to the defender, Viscount Andreu de Moncada, then shall the accuser, the forenamed Perez de l'Arba, be burned at the stake in her stead, for having upborne a false and vile accusation.

"In the Name of God."

When the herald had spoken, Raymond-Bérenger beckoned to the woman who stood before him.

"Lady Maria de Moncada," he began, in a trembling voice, "you have heard the charge. What is your reply!"

Lady Maria met his gaze unfalteringly; her face was radiant.

"As God sees me," she answered firmly, "I am innocent!"

"Administer the oath!" the count commanded.

The priest stepped forward, laid one hand on the crucifix which Maria held, and said in solemn tones:

"Do you swear by Christ's holy passion on the cross that the words you have uttered are true?"

"I swear!" she answered, and kissed the cross.

Once more the heralds blew their trumpets, Lady Maria was led to the foot of that grim pile of fagots, and each of her guards laid hold on her. The squires attendant on the tents drew aside the silken curtains. From that tent nearest the pyre rode forth a tall, powerfully made warrior in full mail, on a magnificent Andalusian charger. His head was bare; his helmet rested on his saddlebow. Spurring his mount, and so reining him that the beast caracolled fierily, Perez de l'Arba rode to the foot of the dais and dipped his lance in reverence to the count.

The multitude of onlookers was silent: no hand clapped, no voice acclaimed him. Yet he sat his horse confidently; a smile of triumph curled his proud lips.

"Sir Viscount," Raymond-Bérenger addressed him, "are you indeed ready to maintain the terrible charge you have laid against this lady?"

"Ready to the death, my lord!"

Bérenger bowed; de l'Arba, putting on his helmet, rode back, and took up his position at one end of the tilting-course. From the second tent a second horseman rode, likewise fully mailed, but helmeted, so that his eyes and lips alone were seen. The crowd, which had burst into wild applause as he flashed into the arena, fell suddenly silent; and as the defender pulled up his white charger before the dais, some one cried from the benches—

"That is not Moncada!"

The count, already risen to receive his greeting, turned on him a glance furious with outraged majesty.

"Who are you, sirrah?" he cried. "Who are you, who thus dare to come before us with covered head, and who presume to substitute yourself for the rightful defender? And where is Andreu de Moncada?"

The unknown warrior, without removing his helmet, answered calmly:

"If it please your Mightiness, I have taken a vow to hide my face until this lying dog of a de l'Arba has fallen before me. Hold it not against my lord de Moncada that I appear in his stead; reasons more powerful than the fear of death have prevented his coming. It is written in the law that, if a combatant fail to appear to maintain his challenge, his place may be taken by any whom the accused may accept. I dare to believe that my lady of Moncada will accept me as her defender in her husband's stead."

The spectators held their breath, uncertain whether this man's daring would win their master's approval or draw down his wrath; but the count was so startled, and so shaken by his fears for Moncada, that it was long before he could answer. At last he replied irresolutely:

"It indeed stands in the law as you have said. But how know I that you are a man whose rank entitles him to maintain such a cause against a noble adversary?"

"I have stood in your presence," the would-be defender retorted, "I have kissed your hand, and been assured of your favor. I pledge my word that my rank is such as entitles me to break lances with any man of blood; and I appeal to your justice."

Bérenger turned to Lady Maria.

"Do you accept this man as your champion?" he asked.

Lady Maria turned grateful eyes on the unknown warrior.

"I do," she responded. "I know him, and he is worthy!"

"Take your place!" the count curtly commanded; and the masked defender rode to his end of the lists, facing the astounded de l'Arba.

But the Navarrese had little time to digest the surprize prepared for him, the appearance of an unknown, strongly-made champion in place of the weak Moncada. For scarce had the two opponents faced each other, when the trumpet sounded, and Raymond-Bérenger signaled for the conflict.

But de l'Arba was skilled in a hundred encounters, and he leveled his lance with steady, practised hand. The spurs shot home; the sand flew in spurts from the hoofs of two charging horses; and with a shock the combatants came together. The head-on force of their impact proved both superb horsemen; but de l'Arba wielded his lance with more skill. It drove full through the center of his adversary's shield, and splintered there. The defender also struck de l'Arba's shield, but his point was dashed aside by the metal boss. The Navarrese recovered instantly, but the crash of meeting almost forced Maria's champion from his saddle. Regaining his seat with difficulty, he snatched out his sword barely in time to ward the other's point.

Now began the perilous second half of the conflict, when sword met sword in blow on blow. The unknown had cast his shield aside, for de l'Arba's lance had made it useless; while the Navarrese had both shield and blade to defend himself. The spectators stared in an agony of suspense; for their hearts were with the defender of Barcelona's honor, and the conflict was going ill with him. Yet at least one of Barcelona's enemies watched the strife with terror: Amat de Cascadour, commanding the count's bodyguard, had recognized Maria's champion by the high ridge on his helmet, and remembered in panic what he had told this man. De l'Arba must win!

But Cascadour was too shrewd to leave anything to fate. He turned to one of his officers.

"If yonder interloper wins, see to it that he dies before he can speak!" he said.

The soldier nodded, and whispered to his comrades.

But now the conflict had taken another turn. De l'Arba, holding the advantage of his good shield, had parried blow after blow, and had not shed a drop of blood; his own point had thrust home again and again. But his opponent's mail held, resisting every thrust. In sudden anger the Navarrese had launched a mighty backhand stroke for the head. Past his foe's guard it drove, and rang on the high ridge of his helmet.

Good cause had the defender then to praise that stout steel crest. His ears sang with the blow, but the helmet held. Again and again de l'Arba rained in blows, most of which the other parried; but blood was dripping now from his left shoulder. Confident of victory, the Navarrese struck harder, wider, laying himself open. One instant he lowered his shield; the next, he must fling himself back in his saddle to escape a lightning thrust. Slowed by his violent backward cast, de l'Arba

felt a second thrust prick through his mail and scratch his chest. He was on the defensive now, and the spectators burst into cheer on cheer.

Then the defender launched a terrible backstroke. In vain de l'Arba strove to meet it; it cleft his shield almost to the band that held it to his wrist. He flung the useless thing aside, and strove to meet his enemy on equal terms. But his advantage was gone: sword to sword, his renowned skill was all too little to meet the play of steel that danced before his eyes, threatening throat, shoulder, breast. A cut to the shoulder forced him to slip from the saddle to avoid being cut in half. On the instant his foe also had dismounted, and in a flurry of swift thrusts drove him to the barrier, almost at the count's feet.

In despair, de l'Arba, parrying with outthrust blade, waved his left hand in a wild signal.

"Strike!" he shouted. "Strike, and save me!"

He who had fought so well for Barcelona pressed home the attack with stroke on stroke, unheeding de l'Arba's cry. His point ripped through de l'Arba's mail, tearing the flesh from the right shoulder. Crippled, his arm helpless, the Navarrese flung down his sword, and fell on his knees.

"Mercy!" he cried.

But his enemy dashed him into the dust, placed a heavy foot on his breast, and held him there. Then, his right hand guiding his point to the fallen man's throat, he raised his left to his helmet and threw it at Bérenger's feet. The beaten de l'Arba gazed up at him with giddy eyes.

"Cercamon!" he cried.

But none had eyes for them now; for the arena was full of struggling men and flashing swords. At de l'Arba's signal, Amat de Cascadour had flung himself at the head of the count's bodyguard, and with brandished blade cried on his hirelings to the attack.

"Seize the count!" he shouted. "And kill yonder dog!"

But the officer whom he had ordered to slay Cercamon turned on him, and drove his point through Cascadour's breast. Then, with a sharp order, he marshaled the guard in a phalanx around the count.

His promptness saved the day; for at Cascadour's command a hundred men had leaped forward to seize Raymond-Bérenger and hold him captive. Even as their swords clashed with those of the guard, they realized with consternation how few they were. Every soldier in the amphitheater should have been a man of Aquitaine; yet but one out of five had obeyed Cascadour's order, and a force as great as their own barred their way. They fought one moment desperately; then a great wave of men-at-arms smote them in the rear, overwhelmed them, struck them to the earth. Within ten minutes every Aquitanian was bound or stretched bleeding on the earth.

FROM the gate outside came the clash and clang of steel, wild shouts, and cries of terror. The startled spectators were on their feet, women shrieking, knights tugging at their swords and pressing forward to climb over the seats and into the fray. But the struggle was over before they could help.

Beckoning to a guardsman to take charge of de l'Arba, Cercamon ran to the gate to take part in the combat there. But there, also, the traitors were outnumbered, overpowered, or driven in flight. Not daring to run to the city, panic-stricken by so sudden and complete a rout where they had expected an easy victory, the survivors dashed toward the river. In full flight they were whelmed from behind by a sudden charge of horse, and driven into the swift stream.

"Well done, Sobre Ter!" cried Cercamon to the leader of the horsemen. "How fares it with the city?"

Luc slid from his horse. "All went as you planned," he panted. "We moved up from Tibidabo last night, under cover of darkness, and found the west gate open for us. La Barca was on duty there; Cascadour must have been mad to let you persuade him to place Thoma there. We poured in, as silently as we could. But when we got on the walls, there was none to oppose us. How had you arranged it? We expected a battle."

Cercamon smiled. "A traitor always suspects treason," he said simply. "Cascadour believed me an agent sent to supervise his work for Aquitaine. I convinced him that there was a counterplot on foot among the people to overwhelm the fort in case Moncada fell; and so, at my suggestion, he moved most of the garrison from the walls down to Montjuich."

"To resist a mere mob?" Sobre Ter asked incredulously.

"Nay, not only that. I made Cascadour believe that you had learned something of his plans and fled southwest to bring back our Catalans; I showed him how clear it was that the faithful troops would return not overland to the city, but march across the narrow neck of southern Catalonia to the sea, take ship, and try to seize the fort from the water at the moment when the mob attacked. Naturally he exposed the city—which he thought safely his—to hold the fort, which was the only spot where he expected attack. When you did not come that way, he left half the garrison in Montjuich and moved the rest to the arena here to carry out his plot."

To Cercamon's bewilderment, Sobre Ter, without another word, fell to his knees. Then a hand was laid on the troubadour's shoulder, and he turned to face the count. Bérenger's face was a picture of consternation and uncomprehending surprize.

"What does this mean, Cercamon?" he cried. "You, alive and fighting in Moncada's stead? My men-at-arms suddenly in arms against each other, and shedding each other's blood? Where is Moncada? And you, Sobre Ter—three weeks gone you disappeared, and now you return with mounted men at your back, and cast yourself upon my soldiers! I command, and none listens to me—all is riot, bloodshed, rebellion!"

"It means this, my lord," Cercamon explained. "There has been treason among your officers; Cascadour would have sold your person, perhaps your life, to Aquitaine. A Navarrese army is even now marching against Barcelona; Navarre and Aquitaine have bartered together for your realm. But now, praise to God, the plot is crushed, and your enemies defeated."

"And thanks to Cercamon," broke in Sobre Ter, "who alone discovered the treachery and found means to foil it! Last night three-fourths of your troops were traitors; now the true men have returned from Aragon to save you."

"But Moncada?" the count repeated.

Sobre Ter laughed.

"Locked in his own villa, guarded by Gui le Balafré. Knowing that Moncada could not stand against de l'Arba, Cercamon gave orders that he be imprisoned in his own house, and took his place."

"I promised your Highness that I would not come to you with anything less than absolute proofs," Cercamon took up the tale. "Learning that de l'Arba had himself murdered Gomez, to force Moncada into a duel that would remove him from Navarre's road to victory, I traced the threads of conspiracy from de l'Arba to Aquitaine. Cascadour was Aquitaine's agent, and had filled the city with Poitevin and Gascon mercenaries. Therefore I spread the report of my own death—which Cascadour had indeed hired assassins to accomplish—and won Cascadour's confidence under an assumed rôle. Finding that he planned to have his troops arrest you today, I sent word to your faithful Catalans on the border of your danger. On my representations Cascadour put la Barca in charge of the west gate; and last night your border troops marched in through that gate. Sobre Ter had joined them west of Tibidabo, and came in with them. Their faces hidden by their cheek-mail, they took the places of all but a few of those who had been set to seize you today. When Cascadour bade them lay hands on you, the traitors obeyed—thus furnishing the evidence I promised you; but they were outnumbered and disarmed by the faithful."

"But how did you substitute Catalans for Aquitanians among my guard?" asked the astounded Bérenger.

"It was indeed a picked band of rascals set to guard you," Cercamon answered. "But I whispered in Cascadour's ear that Sobre Ter—whose flight had made your enemies suspect that he knew too much—had bribed many of their officers, and I persuaded the arch-traitor to let me substitute men that I knew to be true to Aquitaine. But those men whom I put in the Aquitanians' place were honest men under la Barca, who himself slew Cascadour in the moment when the handful of rascals attacked you."

He stopped, interrupted by the clatter of hoofs. A single soldier rode up, reined in, and saluted. It was Jehan Bigot.

"Well done, Bigot!" Cercamon greeted him. "You and Balafré had no trouble in getting the border garrison to return?"

"Never a whit!" Bigot assured him. "You have seen today how well they fought. I feared they might not believe us, in spite of the message we brought

from you that the city was in peril; but luck was with us. Just before we reached the border, word came from the grand master of the Hospitallers. He was frightened and perplexed that we should send so many men to Aragon and keep them there so long; so he hastened to assure the border garrisons of his faithfulness to the count. His message showed our men there that the rumor of war with Aragon had been false; so as soon as we came with our tale, they understood the treachery, and marched back at once. But now the remaining traitors are shut up in Montjuich fort, with our men hammering at the gates. My lord count, I pray you send what men you have here to reinforce us, or we shall not take the fort!"

Raymond-Bérenger looked from Bigot to Sobre Ter, and from him to Cercamon.

"You have proved yourselves men, all of you!" he said warmly. "To you, Cercamon, I owe my throne and my life. Truly shall I keep the promise I made you two months gone. Nay, Bigot, I will not send you reinforcements; too much blood has been spilt. Send envoys to the Aquitanians in the fort, promising them free departure and ships to take them back to Bordeaux if they will go at once."

Bigot rode off as Thoma la Barca came through the gate of the arena, wiping his sword.

"My lord," he retorted, "de l'Arba is dead. Held by two guards, waiting for your command that he be led to the pyre and burnt, he wrenched himself free, snatched a sword from a trooper, and cut down one of his guards. But he was weak from wounds, and when I crossed blades with him, I had but little ado to slay him."

"And Lady Maria?" the count asked. "In my perplexity I had forgot her."

"Behold her!" la Barca answered, pointing to the gate.

The Catalans on guard there, having quenched the last spark of revolt, had stood aside; and the spectators were streaming out. Borne in triumph on the shoulders of two nobles, Maria de Moncada headed a jubilant procession. To the count's presence they bore her, and set her down before him. She was pale, but smiling.

"Ah, my lady, much grief have I had for your sake!" Bérenger exclaimed. "But now all is well. Tell me, did you know that your champion was Cercamon? I think you accepted his services too quickly to have been wholly ignorant."

"Indeed I knew," she answered, "and was glad to have so true a heart and so invincible a sword to protect me. Two days ago he came to me, having won access in the robe of my chaplain, and promised to take my quarrel on his shoulders. I feared that my husband would forbid it; but Cercamon swore to prevent Andreu from taking part in the combat."

Bérenger clapped his hands.

"And so he had Andreu locked up this morning," he said. "'Tis a serious conspiracy against the rules of trial by combat, but God has set His seal upon it by giving victory to the right. Ha, here is Moncada now!"

The little captain-general rode up fuming, his garb awry and his eyes blazing with anger.

"My lord!" he cried, dismounting so hastily that he stumbled, and flaming doubly crimson at his mishap. "A grievous wrong has been done me—my honor is stained! When I woke this morning, and called for my servants to arm me, a dog of a spearman marched into my chamber and forbade me to leave my own house! In vain I struggled—he called four men to hold me. I pray you, do not give judgment against me, but let me meet de l'Arba now!"

"De l'Arba is dead," the count answered gravely, "overcome by the man who kept you from meeting him."

"Show me that man!" Moncada roared. "I will cut him in pieces! He has heaped shame upon me; he has——"

"He has saved your life, your wife's, and mine!" Bérenger reproved the angry little warrior. "Where your arm would have failed, his has triumphed; Barcelona owes her very liberties to him. Now, Cercamon, have I kept my promise? Have I atoned for my insults?"

"Nobly, my lord," Cercamon replied.

But Moncada was not so to be pacified.

"So it was you?" he cried, turning on the troubadour. "You have shamed me in all men's eyes, and you shall pay for it! There lie the lists; come and cross swords with me if you are a man!"

Lady Maria laid a hand on her husband's arm. "You are ungrateful, Andreu," she whispered. "Is it nothing to you that he has saved me from calumny and death?"

Moncada faltered; and perceiving his hesitation, the count placed Cercamon's hand in his.

"If you are the faithful subject I have always deemed you," he commanded, "you will shake hands with the man who has done you the greatest of services, and who hereafter shall be, second only to you, the most honored of my subjects!"

A belated blush of shame tinged Moncada's cheeks. "Your pardon, troubadour!" he muttered.

Cercamon pressed his hand warmly.

"Now to the palace!" the count cried gaily. "You shall make us a song on this day's doings, Cercamon. Order our horses, la Barca!"

"Your Mightiness will not need them," the Catalan answered. "See yonder!"

From the hills beyond the amphitheater, where they had gathered to wait the outcome of the combat, came a mass of folk, flooding down into the valley like a river. They had seen the conflict between their own troops and the Aquitanians outside the gate, but fear of flying arrows had kept them at a respectful distance. Only now had a trooper found time to ride to them with the glad news of de l'Arba's death and Cercamon's triumph. Still in their black garments of mourning, their faces radiant with joy, they swept toward the gate, casting aside as they came the sticks and stones they had brought to avenge the expected death of Moncada.

La Barca's men would have held them off, but the count forbade it.

"Let them have their joy!" he said; and the troops stood aside.

Gathered up by the oncoming wave like chips before a spate, the count, Moncada, Lady Maria and Cercamon were lifted to their shoulders. Thus enthroned, they were borne amid wild rejoicing to the city. Not till the palace was reached did the folk set down its breathless, jolted favorites.

"*Viva* Bérenger!" they shouted. "*Viva* Moncada! *Viva* Cercamon!"

The count faced them, his hand on Cercamon's bleeding left shoulder.

"Behold him who has saved us all!" he cried.

Of this the folk comprehended little; but they cheered again, till they could no more than whisper hoarse jubilation.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOME time ago one of you suggested our printing the Camp-Fire badge on every cover of the magazine. The idea looked good to us here in the office. Why not do it, then? Well, the outside of a magazine concerns more than the editorial department and we had to see whether there were any objections from any other quarter. There weren't any. But we still had to find out whether running our button on the cover conflicted with any of the many post-office regulations. So our legal department consulted the post-office authorities and received their O. K.

On the cover it goes, then, for I've an idea this idea suggested by one of yourselves will meet with general approval and need not be delayed for the taking of a vote. Of course, if there are any objections, it can be taken off, but I don't anticipate any. It does not spoil the general appearance of our covers and it makes each one of them bear definite witness to the feeling of fellowship that exists among us.

The comrade who made the Suggestion was Clarence Jenkins, keeper of station 21 at Braddock, Pa. The idea was entirely his and he ought to have credit for it before Camp-Fire.

HERE is the first letter shedding light on at least a bit of the Indian rock carving shown at our December 20 Camp-Fire:

Noticing the picture of a rock carving or petroglyph in the December 20th issue, I am moved to discourse a little. In June, this year, I photographed many such in Arizona. Many of these are

personal records of individual aborigines. One is the story of a hunt. It shows a hunter, arrow on string and bow half drawn.

IN FRONT and a bit to his right is a bear; below are four deer in single file. A strange thing about these deer is that they were sketched as wearing the "bottle" under the jaw, as does a moose.

I enclose one photograph showing a ledge face, and a peculiar thing about these picture writings is that they invariably occur upon the south face of a ledge. In this picture appear first two wavy lines, running horizontally. These mean lightning flashes.

Above these, at the left, is a man. At the right, a deer. Upon the semi-detached rock are two ceremonial dancers, in their regalia. One is wearing a buffalo head. The other wears just such a mask as is now in use among the Hopi dancers, with a frontal piece resembling an open beak. On this stone also appear two dogs, in miniature.

In the picture on page 183, of *Adventure*, we see at the lower left the accepted signia of the sun, with seven points. Above it a bird track. There are thousands of these, representing wild turkey tracks, in the stones of eastern Arizona. I saw them on cliffs, ledges and flat stones like stepping stones. At Phelp's Ranch, seven miles from Springerville, in a scattering grove of junipers are many of these.

I WOULD not attempt to give the meaning of other figures on this stone. My knowledge is not great enough for that. But I can say that in the southwest it was the practise of the old-time Indians to mark the way to waterholes in this manner, by signs well known to their tribesmen. In the country around Saline Valley, Inyo County, California, the guide marks can still be seen and many whites know how to read them to the extent of using them as guides to water.

In eastern Arizona these rock carvings were made by the ancient tribe from which the present day Hopi descended. This is proved by the similarity between these pictures and those made in modern times by the Hopi, and by the fact that the Sacred Snake, worshiped by the Hopi for many centuries, was dug up in a ruin near Springerville.

The Blackfeet have a tradition that many years ago a delegation was sent south to the land of the Hopi, by their head medicine-man, to worship and pray before this sandstone figure, for the return of the buffalo herds to the Blackfeet country, after a migration.

This, and other evidence, fixes this stone image as a Hopi production. Its presence in prehistoric ruins seems to clench the matter of its having been made and owned by ancestors of our living Hopi.

I found thousands of petroglyphs in sandstone and some on the ends of gray basalt log, which lay like a pile of fence posts, beside our camp nine miles from Springerville, in the cañon of the Little Colorado River. The squash blossom was a favorite decoration with the prehistoric sculptor, as it is now with the living Hopi.

DESERT turtles, frogs, dogs, mountain lions, deer, men, scorpions, all appear in my photographs, with a few bear and lots of turkey tracks, a few bear tracks, mannikins such as the Hopi makes for his ceremonial dances of to-day, the sun and numerous other figures. I found one carving consisting of an excellent representation of a coyote in the act of biting off a turkey's head, but it was too darkly shaded to get a photo.

I am sure that a large part of these rock carvings are merely personal records and individual attempts at art, without special meaning. A coiled snake appears frequently.

The Indians often carved or painted upon the rocks their individual claims to greatness. The plains Indian painted these on hides. Boasting has always been a common amusement among them. There is no manner of doubt that they boasted by word of mouth, the sign language, rock carvings, painted hides and every known means of expression.

IN WYOMING, when a certain chief named Tendoi threatened a group of whites with extermination unless they paid him certain graft, one man who knew Indian ways and signs, picked up the gauntlet. He broke a twig from a bush, then broke it half-way in two. In the broken spot he tied a string and on the other end of the string hung a bullet. This he handed to the enyoy and waved him off.

The chief did not press the matter of collecting his graft. He read the message correctly. "Come and get us, if you think you can."

The white men were altogether too willing to suit his game.

That was brag and bluff, with a readiness to make good the bluff. In many of these petroglyphs, if one could read them, would be found a large amount of brag.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

HERE'S another of the West's real old-timers sitting at our Fire. Here's hoping he'll tell us more about the old days.

Austin, Texas.

Tuttle's Piperock stories remind me of the early cow days in west Texas, when I was a peace officer. I was a peace officer in west Texas for seventeen years in the early '70's and '80's, as Justice of the Peace, Constable, Sheriff and State Ranger. I served in the Ranger service under Maj. John B. Jones, and saw some of the hard work with him in the early '70's. I was in several Indian fights with him. I was acquainted with and knew well some of the bad-men of Texas. I went to school with Ben Thompson, knew King Fisher, who was killed with him, and I knew most all of the bad-men of that day and time.—WALTER M. ROBERTSON.

A LETTER from Emmett Dalton replying to A. E. Brininstool's article in our November 20 issue. I have omitted parts of the letter that were merely expressive of his opinion of Mr. Brininstool and me and I have modified his characterization of the "charge" he specifies, but have omitted nothing that strengthens his case. The only misstatement he specified is that below.

Mr. Brininstool has given me his authority for his statement. There seems no doubt that the men in question were charged with crooked deals, but if the

wording of Mr. Brininstool's article leads any one to believe that they were thus charged while deputy U. S. Marshals, that belief would seem a misapprehension, for in the references thus far submitted I find no basis for that idea.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I have just read an article in your magazine of November 20, 1922, entitled "Bad Men of the Old Frontier," by E. A. Brininstool, in which there are a great many misstatements of facts.

In one part of the article the writer says "Grat, it is said, acquitted himself with credit in the early part of his career as a peace officer, but with Emmett the two brothers were finally charged with some crooked deals, one of which consisted of stealing some horses and disposing of them in Kansas."

The above mentioned charge is false and would lead the readers to believe that my brothers were charged with this crime while they were deputy U. S. Marshals, while in fact, they were never charged with anything but enforcing the law, while they were marshals.

If you want to know the facts, get my book "Beyond the Law," or see my picture "Beyond the Law" and be convinced of the injustice such articles as you published does to me and my dead brothers.

If you are on the square and want to partially undo the wrong you have done us, you will give this statement from me as prominent a position in your next issue as you did the article herein referred to.—EMMETT DALTON.

MR. HOLT, whose "Mohamed Ali" stories are now running, spent five years in Morocco, part of the time as American Consul at Tangier, and of course had a good many of what he calls "experiences," not being able conscientiously to class them as "adventures." He's another one of us who hasn't been able to define the word to our satisfaction. The following letter from him was written in Mexico:

Adventure? I—don't—know. I suppose all adventure is comparative, not only with what we do and with what others do, but with what we read that others have done. Guess I've read too much and known too many fellows who really have had *adventure*—lives in their hands, narrow squeaks, international intrigue—and all that; to say nothing of those folks we all read about, who have only to step out of their homes, on to Broadway or Main Street, to have the most startling things happen to them. The person who had more adventures than any other I have ever known was a little old Connecticut spinster by the name of Miss Pink (she's gone on the Great Adventure now) who had a pile of Nick Carters in her library as high as her head. She was a very nervous type of mortal, and so far as she was concerned, she *was* Nick from Chapter One to the end of the issue.

I'VE sort of reached the conclusion—my hair is getting salted—that adventure lies in the search for it. At any rate, all the adventurousness of my life, which has given opportunity for the "experiences," has been encountered while seeking occasions which never arose. For example: I was headed for St. Petersburg where a lively revolution was in progress. Reaching London, I learned that another one had broken out in Morocco. Morocco was nearest. I went there. The revolution was over by the time I arrived. Had to wait months for another. And then, although twenty or thirty thousand tribesmen were camped in the hills around Tangier and the city was prepared for a siege—what happened? Absolutely all I remember was that an English woman in our hotel had an attack of hysteria and got everybody all fussed up. A little later occurred the "Casablanca Massacre"—the name not being applied to the bombardment of a sleeping Moroccan city by a French warship, but to the killing of a dozen French and Spanish workmen who were desecrating a native cemetery. Tangier was filled with refugees—mostly Jews. And these refugees, together with most of the Jewish population of Tangier, were going *away* as quickly as boats could take them. And that was all of that, absolutely.

Oh, I sought adventure; but it always eluded me. I went on an interior trip of three hundred miles once—when the country was declared "unsafe" by the foreigh ministers. Went alone, except for my caravan. Visited for several days the famous bandit, Raisuli—drank tea with him—lived in a house he set aside for my use—ate his food—used his servants—entertained *him*—talked Perdicaris and Kaid Maclean with him. Anything happen? Not a darned thing. *He* posted four guards at my house, to *keep* anything from happening to me. Oh yes; he asked that I turn over to him two men who had joined my caravan *en route*. Seems they'd just murdered somebody or other, and, being basha of Arzila at the time, Raisuli wanted to have their heads on the city gate. He got 'em; but I didn't even remember the men, let alone seeing anything of the rest of it.

SO I went on—visited another famous Moroccan fire-eater, Bushta ben wild-el-Baghdadi. He'd been commander of the Sultan's troops. Black. And I drank tea—and all the rest of it—with him. Kept going—and I might as well have been playing ring-around-the-rosy in kindergarten. Went back to Tangier in disgust—and that same night and the next one I was shot at on my way home from the houses of friends. But as I didn't know—and never found out—who did the shooting, that didn't do me much good.

Now, spies usually mean adventure of some sort, don't they? Well, the French and German spies in Tangier were so thick when I was there that you were satisfied that everybody was one or the other—or else an English foreign intelligence agent. Friend of mine was a Belgian agent. Went with him into a café one night and had drinks. His was poisoned; mine wasn't. But he didn't quite die. Spies are monotonous if too numerous. Also funny.

Again, I was once deserted by my guide—who got drunk—fifty miles from Tangier. I'd never been over the trail before. I discovered at dawn that I was alone. Gave my mule (they're better than horses, there) his head—and I was home for evening dinner. May have been an adventure for the mule!

OR YET again: those same Anghera hills that Mohamed Ali hides among, were in a state of high tension. A Frenchman had tried to steal some tribal land on the west—and the natives white-washed the big rock where they got him. A Spaniard had made the same mistake on the east—and the Riffians white-washed another rock. Consequently the foreign ministers had all instructed their people to stay out of Anghera—quite a ways out. But it so happened that I'd been invited by the chiefs of several of the Anghera tribes to come and camp a while among them—and shoot pig. I'd accepted, so I went. I went in the darkness—to prevent any well-meant interference—and I had an escort of six husky Angherine gentlemen who had foregathered at my house—also in the darkness—with .45-70's under their brown *djellaba*, and daybreak saw my tents pitched in the trouble zone. But was there any trouble? There was not! Not even the rumor of it. I stayed there for a week or more. And about the only "experience" was that I was elected chief of two villages by two score brown "head-men" who sat around in a big circle with their guns across their knees—and wanted me to explain to them how they could keep from killing Frenchmen and Spaniards who tried to steal their land. And somehow—I couldn't. And yet within a little while, my best friend among the Moors, who was in camp with me then, was killed among these same people.

This "chieftainship" was interesting in one way. The people of Anghera are named from Tanghera, who was the wife of old Hercules, and they call themselves, therefore, still, "Sons of Hercules." Mythology says Hercules discovered Tangier, defeated the king, Anteus, and ruled, himself. Those people of Anghera over whom I was chief for a while were veritable descendants of the hero of old. And Mohamed Ali, as you have read, was one of them also.

YES: there was one "experience" which was almost an adventure. One evening at a dinner party I was told that a body of 400 French troops, with machine-guns, were on their way to wipe out "my" two villages. I had to get there—first. The *shurgy*—levanter—sirocco was blowing a hurricane. Wind was so strong it blew pebbles from the beach, like bullets. I went by the beach. The troops had taken a longer route. Picked up a couple of husky bandits that I knew, on the way. Ever try to ride *fast* in evening clothes? In a *shurgy?* On the beach? *And* we had to swim a river. That was a nice "soup and fish" while it lasted. But we beat the troops, and when they arrived there wasn't a man, woman, child, horse, dog or chicken left in the village. The French? Oh, they went on and cleaned out another village farther along. Persistent people!

When the Sultan Abb-el-Aziz was overthrown by a revolt, all I saw of the revolution was Abd-el-Aziz. When Raisuli captured Kaid Sir Harry Maclean and held him for ransom, all I saw was Kaid Maclean. And I may say—although the genial Sir Harry has passed on into the Smiles of the Prophet—that *that* affair was a howling farce. Maclean wrote a story for an American magazine describing his hardships and saying that his captivity had reduced him to skin and bones. He forgot to include flesh—and either he was mistaken in his statements or else he had the secret of "How To Grow Fat"—quickly; because I spent an hour with him the day after he was released and the person he most resembled was the well known friend of childhood—Santa Claus. I said something similar to Raisuli once—about Maclean's published accounts of his captivity—and Raisuli was much offended; claimed that he'd treated Maclean like a brother. And I know he had—for Raisuli was—and is—very much of a real man.

GREETINGS from Camp-Fire Station No. 113. Members of the Order of the Kangaroo in the Canal Zone please take notice.

Vallejo, Calif.

Greetings: Just to let you know that Kangaroo Camp-Fire 113, has still a bit o' brush to pile on the evening camp-fire. It seems that we have been especially lucky in having the girls that made the transcontinental hike to San Francisco stop and say "How" at our camp. We uns surely have good times when the brush is burning, and we uns are all enjoying a lazy position, taking in all that is being said.

Our reason for calling our camp fire "Kangaroo" is that we both were life members of the order on the Canal Zone, and Mr. Engesser is charter member of Empire Court No. 1. Wonder if Franke or Young remembers the open house we used to keep at the club rooms? Enough said.—EDITH G. ENGESSER.

SEND your old magazines and other reading matter to those in hospitals and jails. If you've ever been in either one you'll know what reading-matter means there. Here's an appeal from a comrade in for five years. If he deserved the five years I'm glad he got them; if he didn't, I'm sorry. In either case I can't see why he and his fellows aren't still to be considered human and offered a human hand. As to our comrades in hospitals, particularly those who got there through fighting our battles, their case is patent.

State Penitentiary, Stillwater, Minn.

Camp-Fire: I have been an *Adventure* fan since Vol. I, No. 1 and a tongue tied Camp-Fire member from its inception.

BEFORE I leave the gang, I wish to offer a suggestion. It is one that has been made before, but I believe it will bear repetition. If you have any magazines or other reading matter which is of no further value to you, donate it to the boys in your local jails or other places of confinement. I spent three months in the county jail awaiting trial. The reading matter furnished us was three copies of *Collier's* for 1916 and two *Argosies* of ancient vintage. The expenditure of fifteen dollars for fresh reading matter brought more pleasure into that bastile than five hundred dollars ever gave me before.

Adventure is a matter of temperament. Romance one of perspective. Humanity reacts to only a

limited number of stimulants. Consequently the sum of human activity is always constant. Substitute Kuppenheimer, Stetson and Florsheim for doublet, hose and plumed cap; train for stage coach; automatic for sword; union for guild; gunman for bravo; bum for beggar, and any tale of modern life becomes a romance of the Middle Ages. The puppets are always the same. The plays are always the same. The costumes and stage setting alone change. Robber barons, swashbucklers, masterless men, soldiers returned from the wars, the whole colorful gang are here to day. François Villon occupied a cell adjoining mine. Madam Brinvilliers awaits her trial. Adios—until five years drag by.—HELMER BJORGE.

THOSE camels the Government imported as an experiment. An old-timer of the West tells of meeting three of them. Also of finding a mastodon tusk six thousand feet above sea-level. Won't some of our scientist readers tell us in brief just what did happen to this part of the little old world? Did the mastodon have the mountain-goat habit or was he heaved up into the air by some convulsion of the earth?

I'm glad Mr. Burgman has joined our Camp-Fire and hope he will talk to us again. Camp-Fire has special welcome for the old-timers of the West.

Daytona, Florida.

Have been an interested reader of *Adventure* for more than a year, and, while in the City of New York recently, purchased copy bearing date of October tenth. On page No. 174 I find an article under the title "Camels in the U. S." This article brought to my mind a long forgotten incident and related to the subject of your article.

I RECEIVED my discharge from Company L, Sixth U. S. Cavalry, in November, 1878. Company L, with Company H, of the same regiment, was stationed at Fort Bowie, Arizona, situated in the Chiricahua range of mountains. In January, 1879, I built at Dos Cabesos (Two Heads), twelve miles distant from Fort Bowie, on the western slope of the Chiricahua Mountains, the first house and stocked it with merchandise bought in Tucson, in what had then developed into a gold mining camp. During the following Summer there strayed into our camp three camels out of the desert, then known as the Sulphur Springs Valley, whose western boundary is recorded on the map of Arizona as Dragoon Mountains. Dos Cabesos is situated on a straight line about thirty miles east of the famous Cochise's stronghold.

THESE camels were thought by the miners to have escaped somewhere from some passing circus, as no one could account for their presence otherwise. They were permitted to wander at large for several months, but their presence, while feeding at intervals along the main traveled road, frightened the stage horses and thereby endangered the lives of the stage coach passengers. Along the hillsides they stampeded the horses, mules and burros of the miners, and eventually were declared to be a common nuisance, and by decree of the mining community were condemned to death and killed.

In communicating this incident to you in substantiation of your article, I thought it would interest the readers of *Adventure*, and it might come to the notice of some of those earlier pioneers who entered Arizona in pre-telegraph, pre-tombstone and pre-railway days.

WHILE in Uncle Sam's service at Fort Bowie in 1876 I had charge of a group of offenders of military discipline with orders to have them clean out a mountain spring from which the garrison derived its water supply. This was the only spring between San Simon stage station, twenty-five miles to the east, and Sulphur Spring stage station, twenty-two miles westward. Above this spring a great ledge reared its head to a height of two hundred and fifty feet. Fort Bowie, now abandoned, and this spring are situated approximately six thousand feet above sea level. The immigrant caravans who traveled the old trail out of New Mexico toward California in order to reach this spring had to climb out of the San Simon Valley, over a rough mountain road, to a height of about three thousand feet. The Chiricahua Apaches, the most savage and dangerous of all the Apache tribes, made this mountain range their home and hunting-grounds, and were bitterly opposed to the invasion of the pale face. Groups of their young warriors, from time to time, would station themselves on top of this ledge and patiently await the arrival of the immigrants at this spring and murder them.

It was for this reason that the Government, after determined warfare with these savages, established Fort Bowie at this place for the protection of these passing immigrants during the earlier sixties of the last century. Even so, it was related to us that these savages, at times, suddenly and unexpectedly, would emerge seemingly from nowhere and dash across the parade grounds of the fort into the tangled trails and ravines of the jagged mountains, yelling savage defiance at the troopers of the Fifth Cavalry stationed there, whom we relieved in the Summer of 1875.

TO RETURN to my detail of prisoners, I was sitting with my Springfield carbine across my knees on a projecting rock, watching the prisoners at their labor. On my left the road from the Fort wound its way through the intricacies of rock formation some distance from where I was stationed. The side of the rock, over which the road was built, ended sharply at a small declivity, and, in casting my eyes about, I noted on the side of this rock a strange circular formation about eight inches in diameter. Taking out my pocket knife, I cut out the decomposed surface surrounding this circle and found to my astonishment that it was part of an ivory tusk embedded in the rock. With the help of the prisoners we carefully removed the surrounding mass and slowly obtained about a foot of this tusk, evidently part of a member of the extinct family of mastodon, which I took over to the Adjutant's office with the view of having it packed and shipped to some bureau in Washington. I do not now remember whether the Smithsonian Institution was organized at that time to receive finds of this character. However, exposed to the atmosphere, the find disintegrated too rapidly for shipment.

I am wondering what great convulsions in nature converted at one time great fertile plains, teeming with great antediluvian mammals ranging through luxuriant forests, and converted them into high rocky mountain ranges and barren deserts. Remember this part of a mastodon's tusk was found in a rock formation six thousand feet above sea level in the Chiricahua range of mountains in Arizona.

The young student of geology and paleontology will find here a very interesting subject to ponder over.—CHAS. F. BURGMAN.

THOMSON BURTIS of our writers' brigade being recently of the Air Service, his address has hopped around all over the country. All at once his letters began coming from a hospital and naturally I asked how he got there. He wrote again several times, but forgot to include this point. Finally, after repeated inquiries, the following was tucked into a letter about other matters:

Louisville, Kentucky.

As to my wreck, that's a long story. It includes a motor cut on the takeoff, slicing off my landing gear on a building, landing the bare fuselage in Lake Michigan on a cold day, the compass smiting me a mighty smite upon the dome, and so forth. For feelings and so forth see any story of mine. I was ten feet from the shore—or rather, shallow water, with a passenger knocked cuckoo and my formfitting boots. That was some ten feet. For a while I regretted not being on good terms with God.

By the way, they're commencing to pick the boys off again. When Benton A. Doyle was one of the six killed at Langley last week, there went my friend who is the original of *Larry Hinkley* in a couple of stories. Doyle was forty, had bummed all over the world, and so forth.—THOMSON BURTIS.

ALL the individuals and groups who would profit by it personally are working for an increase in immigration. That's all they care about—their own profit. The general welfare of the country as a whole doesn't interest them. We already have more immigrants than we've been able to absorb. Only 54 and a fraction per cent. of our population is of white American parentage. Think that over. If you doubt it, write to the Census Bureau. Less than 55 per cent.

As one example of very many, the National Association of Merchant Tailors of America found skilled workmen hard to get and therefore asked Congress to admit desirable aliens for any trade in which there was a pronounced shortage. In view of the way our immigration laws are administered and enforced, you can see what that would lead to. Might as well take down all the bars.

The capitalists are arguing that the present three per cent. allowed should be increased according to the number of foreigners returning from here to their homes. Edging up. They don't quite dare attack the restriction outright. And they want the literacy test abolished.

Any kind of exception will mean a far greater letting down of the bars than would appear on the face of things. The present three per cent. restriction law itself means a far greater letting down of the bars than it indicates on its face. It is conceivable that there might be some exception that would admit no more than it claimed to admit, but it is *not* conceivable unless along with it were passed a law to send to the penitentiary for twenty years any Immigration official, from lowest to highest, who allowed the enforcement of any immigration law to wander from the strict letter of the law by even a hair's breadth. Ten years for any citizen who even attempted to bring about any such deviation. No fines. Straight prison sentences. And really enforced.

As things are, in actual practise there can be no sound and sure bar against immigration except total exclusion. No really effective one except total exclusion for at least a generation. If America is to remain America, we have enough immigrants.

THE San Blas. A letter from a comrade who knows them and has been looking at them and their territory from a hydroplane:

Balboa, C. Z.

I have been on the Isthmus relatively only a short time, but during the past six years I have had quite a few opportunities to get an appreciable amount of first-hand knowledge of their pet idiosyncrasies.

THEY don't want prospectors; they punish by death lax morality in their *women;* they deal only with people who have established at least a fair reputation for square-dealing (as the Robert Wilcox outfit, etc.); they have a rough sort of outpost established along their borders, and seem to have efficient methods in dealing with intruders that do not accede to their requests to "move on."

I do not recollect any specific instance of any one being shot for intruding past the border, but I, personally, have been told to move camp to a place further removed from the border.

There may be no San Blas women that have married outside their tribe, but any anthropologist could find that the males are somewhat more indiscriminate in their relations with the accessible females of Central America. At Colon there are several half-breeds, of San Blas parentage, unless

I am sadly mistaken; and the type is so distinct through intermarriage that it is hard to mistake.

DURING the War we made patrols twice a day, usually to the San Blas Gulf and back, so that we had plenty of opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the look of the place from the air; we flew Curtiss hydros most of the time, and several times made landings at the Islands.

I believe that Lieutenant Malloway, Air Service Pilot, and Sergt. Briscoe, Machine-Gunner, from France Field, were the first men that ever landed there with a hydro. The Indians were very much afraid of it at first, but soon became a nuisance, trying to climb all over it and remove anything that wasn't bolted down.

It was rather the usual thing for the natives of the interior to waste black powder and slugs, shooting at a ship going over their territory; at three to five thousand feet there wasn't much danger.

AT THE present time it is quite the style to get up an excursion to visit the San Blas Islands, to buy curios and photograph the Indians. They are becoming "civilized" to the extent of charging a peso for the job of posing for the camera, and charging five times what their "curios" are worth.

According to their own standards, the San Blas belles may be beautiful, but I can't see any way that they would captivate the average white man. Their type of beauty is peculiar, to say the least, even if you bar the usual nose-rings; however, there's no accounting for tastes.

The gold that is supposed to be there lies mostly in the prospector's mind; I have talked with one chap that has been all over the San Blas cordilleras, from one end to the other; he found traces and color in nearly every creek-bed, but not in paying quantities. The last time I saw him he had been in the bush for eight months and had about a thousand dollars worth of fine dust.—L. C. LEIGHTON.

YOU'LL remember that when we published "The Sea-Hawk," by Rafael Sabatini, last year I explained in advance that, though it had never appeared in any American magazine, it had years ago been printed in book form here, though only a small number of copies were sold. I asked whether you approved of this experiment, this violation of the almost ironclad custom of always publishing in magazines first, books afterward. Why not sometimes book first, magazines afterward?

Of the many who replied 91 per cent. favored the idea, most of them strongly. Only four had read the story in book form and all four voted in favor of the republishing. (I'd asked all who'd read it previously to speak up.)

As to the story itself only two did not like it. In addition to the above votes there were some eleven favorable ones that weren't clear as to whether it was the story, the stunt or both that they favored.

This seems to me a more than sufficiently strong majority vote to OK this stunt for the future for this particular magazine audience. I'd not like to try it on the audiences of most of the other magazines. But be assured that it will not be tried often even with us. The idea as stated was not to go into the business of publishing stories that had had distant or negligible book sales. What I wanted to know was whether I had your OK in advance if any other good opportunities, like that of "The Sea Hawk," arose in the future. They don't arise often. I'm glad you favor grabbing more of them when and if they do arise and I thank you for taking the trouble to join in editorial counsel on this point.

Altogether apart from the above question is that of reprinting a story from our own magazine. We have done this twice in our over twelve years, once "The Soul of a Regiment," by Talbot Mundy, and once "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure," the funeral sermon preached over Grannan the gambler by the Rev. Knickerbocker.

Also we republished H. D. Couzens' "Brethren of the Beach," but in a form considerably enlarged over its original. Even after reprinting, we still get requests from you for again printing the first two, especially the funeral sermon over Grannan. It doesn't seem to me that the demand as yet quite warrants a third printing of even the Grannan sermon, but it's up to you.

There have been, too, requests for a republishing of "The Green Splotches," by T. S. Stribling, and, of course, various stray requests for other stories.

All this is up to you. Any time enough of you seem to want any story reprinted we'll gladly comply. But we want to be sure of the demand before printing even one old story in place of one new one.—A. S. H.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Bigelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel (*See next section*).

4. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico and Virgin Group
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

5. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage cents.*)

6. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn) Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

7. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

9. New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

10. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing minerals, agriculture, commerce.

11. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

12. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

13. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached*)

14. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
ROBERT SIMPSON, care *Adventure*. Labor trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

15. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

16. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
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17. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

18. Africa Part 5 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

19. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

20. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

21. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. Balkans, except Albania
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

23. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

24. Scandinavia
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25. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
FRED F. FLEISCHER, 426 15th St., West New York, N. J. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

26. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

27. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

28. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

29. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

30. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Box 182, Salinas, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

31. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

32. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

33. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
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34. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
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35. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
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REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

37. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

38. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1436 Hawthorne Terrace, Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

39. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

40. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev. Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

41. Western U. S. Part 2 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

42. Western U. S. Part 3 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

43. Western U. S. Part 4 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

44. Western U. S. Part 5 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

45. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

46. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

47. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

48. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

49. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

50. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
HOWARD A. SHANNON, care Howard-Leach Co., Inc., 308 Law Bldg., Norfolk, Va. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, seatrout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

51. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

52. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Maine
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

RADIO

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

MINING and PROSPECTING

VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800- Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce variеties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

All inquiries for information regarding the national parks, how to get there and what to do when you get there, should be addressed to the National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Mesquite Roots

WOOD-CUTTING, trapping, fishing in California:

Question:—"Will you please answer the following: Would it be possible for me to make my living sawing and selling cord-wood in the country you have in your section (along coast)?

Would the wood country be so situated as to enable me to commercialize along fishing lines? By this I mean netting fish in large quantities.

Could you select a spot for me that would combine trapping along with the other two requisites?

Is the transportation good in all localities, or would I have long hauls to make to settlements and towns? Is game, small and big, plentiful?

In the country you may select for me that combines big-scale fishing, cord-wood cutting and trapping, what minerals would exist, if any?

What outfit do you suggest for the fishing and trapping end of the plan? There are two of us.

Do you know of any maps of your locality, or books that give information about fishing with nets, etc.?

What sort of weather would I run into—Winnipeg Winters or your own Los Angeles kind?

I have asked many questions, Mr. Harriman, and you may need to read them over several times to get their meanings, but I am eager to get your answers, as my friend and I are planning permanent settlement; and things we have asked about are to provide us with a living, not for a month, but for years.

If you think our plan of cutting cord-wood; of catching fish for market; of trapping, is not feasible, we would appreciate your saying so.

And if there is anything you know will interest us, why send it along, Mr. Harriman; we will appreciate it."—EDW. DEGUIRE, Clear Lake, Ia.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—I do not think you could make a living at wood-cutting for the market. In the first place you would be obliged to buy your trees from private owners or the Forestry Service. Where such trees can be had at reasonable rates the price of wood is low. The inhabitants are few. The transportation is poor. Your margin of profit would be almost infinitesimal. And this section is the only one where salmon-fishing is any good.

You see, the wood-cutting in the south is all done in mountains by Mexicans. Or in the case of mesquite is grubbed out of the earth. Down at Blythe they have mesquite trees that show a trunk about as large as my leg and perhaps ten feet above the sand. Below the sand will be arched and knotted roots that will make several wagon-loads to one tree. I know of one case where a man dug the sand away and made a stable for a horse under the roots of a mesquite.

North of San Francisco is the heavy timber, the dense forests. There they cut ties and some fuel from fallen trees and trees not up to standard for lumber. The lumber companies employ men to do this. It is in the rivers up there that they get salmon, also in Oregon.

Trapping is not especially good, just moderate. I advise you to go to Requa, Del Norte County, California. There you will find forests where you may get work in lumbering; and salmon run up the Klamath. There are dairy-farms up there, offering some openings for men.

I am sorry, but I do not know any books on net fishing. Weather is mostly moderate, with heavy rains in Winter, no snow, no freezing ice. A little, very little, gold found there. Get your outfit after you see what the rest use. It is cheaper than packing it out here from Iowa.

Salmon are taken in nets and with lines, too. I know one man using lines, who made eighty dollars in one night. Humboldt County offers logging jobs at good wages, all-the-year-round work. At Scotia, Eureka, Arcata, Samoa.

That beats trapping in my opinion; and wood-cutting is no good.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

The Z. M. R's Motto

THE correspondence with Brother Mills, to which Captain Durand refers, appeared in "A. A." for Feb. 10, 1923:

Question:—"The motto of the Zululand Mounted Rifles is *Wa tshe tsha*. Can you give me the English translation, please?

The Great War left me a partial crock, but as I am one of those who have 'the tuck of drum' in my system I couldn't altogether sever myself from the service. I started out to collect the military badges of the British Empire. I had a few before the War, but mostly of the regular forces of Great Britain. During the war I gathered a few more, and now I have somewhere about three thousand specimens, all different, from all parts of the British Empire.

But I am not merely a collector. It is not sufficient for me to have the badge; I want to know all about it. I have recently obtained the badge of the Zululand Mounted Rifles, which is a rhinoceros with the motto quoted above, and I want to get the English of it, hence my troubling you. If you are not able to give it to me perhaps you might be able to refer me to some other person to whom I could apply.

Mr. Tom L. Mills, who deals with the New Zealand section, was good enough to give me the English meanings of several Maori mottoes of New Zealand regiments.

I enclose an international reply coupon and addressed envelop."—PHILIPPE DURAND, Cathcart, Glasgow, Scotland.

(Captain, Late 7th (Blythswood) Bn., the Highland Light Infantry.)

Answer, by Capt. Franklin:—Your question nearly stumped me, and I was much afraid I should have to give you the bird so to speak in reply. However, we "Ask Adventure" editors don't give up too easily, so here it is:

The literal translation of *Wa tshe tsha* is "You burn—you burn—beware." Action is: Spear and shield held high above head, right foot forward. Zulu warriors lunge forward and stamp the ground hard with right foot as cry is uttered.

My reply is through the courtesy of Santie Sabalala, with whom I communicated.

Word from a Hassayamper

HERE'S a letter we received and sent along to Brother Shaw as checking up, confirming and supplementing some information he'd already given:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

UNITED STATES INDIAN FIELD SERVICE

Office of Supervising Engineer

Albuquerque, N. M.

DEAR SIR AND COMRADE:

I was much interested in the question and answer in "Ask Adventure" in the issue of August 20, 1922, regarding hunting and fishing in southern Utah and northern New Mexico, especially since this has been a part of my stamping-ground for the past twenty years.

Mr. Perrine, who asks for the information, may be interested to know that in New Mexico, thanks to the activities of the United States Biological Survey, the predatory animals are getting rather scarce. In the interest of the stockmen of the State six regular hunters are maintained most of the year whose business it is to kill off the animals that prey on stock.

A recent census taken by the survey reveals the startling fact that there are now but fifty wolves (lobos) remaining in the State, and an equal number of mountain lions. There are only six or seven grizzlies remaining in the State.

The survey is keeping such close tab on these animals that the general location of their homes is well known as most of them have been named by the Federal hunters.

One of the officers of the survey recently stated—"If any one desires to hunt big predatory game in New Mexico, we can tell him the exact locality in which to go and just how many of the animals are in that section."

The brown or black bear is still plentiful in the State and is estimated by the survey to number between 600 and 700. As the black bear is not predatory he is not molested by the hunters.

Coyotes still flourish in the State, and the census

puts their number at between 25,000 and 30,000.

I would take exception to one or two items of the game list, made by Mr. Shaw. He mentions sage hens in New Mexico. So far as I can find out a sage hen has never been found in New Mexico, and I have made inquiries within the past six months in the northwestern part of the State because of rumors that some had been seen in that locality.

Mr. Shaw's "wild pigeons" are of course the mourning dove.

He mentions in his list of southwestern Colorado game, otter and pheasant. I have never heard of the former in that section, and the pheasants, so far as I am able to determine, are only in the central part of Colorado, where they have been "planted" from the pheasantries maintained in the City Park at Denver.

He fails to mention the red fox. The region under discussion has many red and gray foxes, and their fur is both beautiful and valuable. A few years ago at one trading-store on the San Juan River I saw a season's catch of over 40 red fox pelts that could not be surpassed any place.

As an old-timer in the Southwest—I am a regular Hassayamper, having drunk from the waters of that famed stream 35 years ago—I would like to rise in my place and inquire why all the tenderfeet, even to this day, think it necessary for the preservation of their life to pack a six-gun if they get west of the Missouri River?

I lived in Arizona and New Mexico when it was wild and woolly, the days of the Lincoln County War and Billy the Kid, when the equally famous Tonto Basin War was going on in Arizona, in the days when the "Road to Ruin" and the "Bucket of Blood" saloons were actual facts in Phoenix; have seen some shooting affrays on the streets and heard bullets sing over my head in the Tonto Basin; *but* in all the years I have lived in the "wild and woolly" I never packed a gun and never got into trouble because I didn't have one, and perhaps saved trouble that I might have had had I carried one.

Please tell the dear tenderfoot that the only place that a man needs a gun in these days is in the cities of New York and Chicago—perhaps.

If you pack a gun and look for trouble you'll surely find it—probably at the hands of the nearest peace officer—but if you mind your own business and don't look for trouble, there isn't much chance of it finding you.—H. F. Robinson.

Mr. Shaw replied as follows:

My Dear Mr. Robinson:

Am mighty glad to meet another old-timer, particularly a regular Hassayamper, who has ranged so long over the same section as myself. In addition, we of the "A. A." staff like to be checked up whenever it may be thought necessary to supplement or correct. It is always salutary and tends toward keeping us hewing close to the line.

In this regard it has been for some time a moot question as to just how "expert" members of our staff really are. You, as an old buck Hassayamper, know that you can start six men over the desert, or through the hills or forest, either hunting or even on actual reconnaissance work, and when questioned as to details there will be six different replies.

Moreover, among our own staff not so many of the members are now actually in the fields they endeavor to cover. In my own case, I came to the Southwest in 1900 and did not leave until the Fall of 1914. Nor was I quite a "tenderheel" in 1900, having joined the gold rush to the north in 1898 and having made two expeditions to the arctic in the years '97 and '99.

This is merely my own dossier given in exchange for yours. Not having been in the Southwest since '14, many changes may have occurred, of course, but mainly in specific details and not affecting general information. That region is not so situated as to alter very greatly in the space of a few years. I shall be back there again some time this year. In fact, I have expected to return by last July at the latest. When I do, I'll be able to do my own checking.

Now, in regard to items in your letter:

It seems to be mainly a matter of nomenclature. I have given the local phraseology. You, as an old trail hound down there, must know that ranchers, cow-hands, etc., use the terms pheasant, sage hen, prairie chicken, grouse, etc., almost interchangeably.

I'll admit that you have one on me in regard to the fox in New Mexico. I did overlook mentioning him and am glad to be corrected, for it is an important item.

The "wild pigeon" is indeed the mourning dove, but it has been my experience that most of the *hombres* in that section wouldn't know what you were talking about, using the latter term. The birds are, as you know, quite numerous in season, and are hunted a great deal, but enthusiasts of my acquaintance always say—

"I'm going after pigeons."

You will note that my mention of "otter" was for the region near Pagosa Springs. I homesteaded up near the head of the Pine River, and all the game I mention was plentiful, although the otter was not very conspicuous, I'll admit. I trapped eleven silver-tip and cinnamon in one month, practically on my 160, and there were plenty of fox (please note that I did not overlook this item for this section) both of the red and cross varieties. I never happened to hear of any silver-grays being seen or trapped.

Glad you back me up about the ubiquitous "six-gun." Funny that it is still necessary! First thing the blame tenderheel buys is a .45, generally with a stamped belt and holster, and most of the shooting scrapes I've seen lately have been started (not finished) by some wild-eyed boob who didn't know that the movies he'd seen depicted the life of fifty years ago.

I say "fifty years ago," but really that goes only for the country in general. Certain more remote parts were still mighty "woolly" only as far back as '01-'02. Take it around Rico, Telluride, Silverton, and down in the La Platas; there were many of the real gun-men still left when I first rode down through there. I've had the lead whizz uncomfortably close myself; but I wasn't "heeled," and the shooting didn't concern me either. I think the point the average tenderheel doesn't know is that since Law came to the Southwest and no man needed to carry it strapped to his waist, the only reason for carrying a gun was that cow-hands riding range sometimes need one to despatch an animal crippled by accident.

Your statistics regarding predatory animals is interesting and certainly does sound familiar. One of my brothers was forest supervisor for the Durango

National Forest; another top ranger for the Hermosa District, some forest. I spent several seasons also under Government commission as guard and was also with the boys in some of their reconnaissance camps, where we all kept alert for predatory animals.

In the section named there were few if any lobos. Heard of tracks being seen once or twice, but never had it proved, and never saw them myself.

It might interest you to learn, if you do not now know, that coyotes were thick in the San Juan Mountains when I was last there. They followed the sheep from the lower country on their Summer drives to timberline.—VICTOR SHAW.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Conditions in Austria and Poland

WAGES paid to skilled Austrian workmen run up to ten million crowns a month—par value, $2,026,000. Only the crown is about as far from par as the late Emperor Franz Josef is from the Pearly Gates:

Question:—"Would it prove to my advantage to buy the money of either Austria or Poland, go over and either buy real estate or a farm and hold it for the rise in exchange?

Could you give me an idea as to the cost of property which I am interested in?

Is there any opportunity for a young man aged twenty-five to go over to either of these countries—Austria preferred—and commence some manufacturing business in the textile branch, as I am experienced and have a fair knowledge of the German language?

Could you also give me an idea of wages paid to skilled workers in Austria?

Do you think that either of these countries has a fair chance in some recovery which will enhance the value of their currency?"—ARTHUR FOX, Philadelphia, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Fleischer:—Your first question is the easiest. As far as Austrian money is concerned, there is hardly ever a chance of the value appreciating within a time which one could estimate. The republic is really a city of two million people and surrounding country inhabited by twice that many. The country is hardly self-supporting, as far as the farmers are concerned, and they are not inclined to sell foodstuff to Vienna, nor do they wish to ship it there.

The industries are hardly worth mentioning. There is a little export in cheap clocks, leather goods, luxury articles—but almost no textiles. The chief industry of Austria today is printing paper money.

Poland is a little better off, but she keeps too large an army, and to support it costs money. Poland has to convince the world that she is able to govern herself and to keep on progressing.

Do not invest in the currency of either country.

I have been informed that due to the constant fluctuation in exchange no fixed value of property can be given. Five hundred dollars would buy quite an estate in Austria, and hardly more is needed to purchase a farm in Poland. Since you prefer Austria, I would suggest the fertile valley of the Danube, especially near Linz in Upper Austria. In Lower Austria, nearing Vienna, mostly grape-vines are grown and some hops.

In order to advise you correctly I have conferred with an authority on textile industry and the manufacturing end of it, and he informs me that quite some capital, DOLLARS, would be needed to import the raw material. Figuring that you would have to purchase a plant, if you could not build your own, I doubt if five thousand dollars would cover initial expenses.

The wages paid skilled workers vary. They make as much as ten millions crowns a month. In real money that is less than an office boy gets a week here in New York.

As long as the provisions of the Versailles Treaty must be lived up to by the defeated States and no modification will be introduced, there is no chance that Austria will ever recover. Poland, although better off, which does not mean much, has a better chance, as this country has the support of France. There might be a chance that Polish currency will appreciate; personally I doubt it.

Vienna, the only place as far as Austria is concerned. Poland: Either Warsaw or Lodz. The latter is the center of textile industry.

I have answered your questions in rotation, but I do not hesitate to discourage you. In case you should go over there, you would return a disappointed and wiser man.

There is the question of language. In Austria or Czechoslovakia you can get by with German; not in Poland. German is taboo there. Ignorance of the native tongue would be a hindrance to you.

To the Prospective Homesteader

SO MANY people have asked Brother Middleton about homesteading in his section that he has found it worth while to write the following monograph on the subject. This same monograph has also been reprinted as a leaflet, which he will send to inquirers free upon request, accompanied by stamped, addressed envelop:

Laramie, Wyo.

The only satisfactory way for a man to locate is to make a general inspection of the State, then a thorough investigation of the locality that has appealed most to him. He should acquaint himself with prices of material in this locality, and plan on his probable expenses before selling equipment he may have on hand.

The prospective settler, to insure success, should be able to furnish himself with the necessary equipment to carry on his work. A wagon, a plow, a disk and a spike-tooth harrow are necessary at the start. Four horses—or, better still, a small tractor and a team of horses—two cows, hogs—two sows with litter would be fine—twenty or more chickens, money to build a house, sheds and to buy seed, feed and provisions until the crops come in.

Would advise buying relinquishment where possible. This often saves fencing, building, digging well, etc., and shortens time of bringing place to self-sustaining basis. Relinquishments

can be bought very reasonably in many instances, price depending on size of place, distance from railroad, improvements on place, etc.

A list showing general character of land open to homestead entry in various States on the thirtieth day of the preceding June, may be had at any time by writing Commissioner of the General Land-Office, Washington, D. C. Write General Land-Office also for Circulars Nos. 541 and 523, "Suggestions to Homesteaders." These give detailed information as to qualifications to enter, requirements, soldiers' and sailors' rights, fees and commissions, etc.

A diagram showing entered land in any township may be had from the registrar and receiver of the proper local office upon the payment of one dollar.

While proving up on homestead, keep record of cost of everything—your labor, fence material, logs and lumber, etc., even to a pound of shingle nails, or a dime's worth of putty. It all has to be submitted when making final proof. Government stipulates cabin not less than 12 by 12 feet.

Would strongly advise that the newcomer secure work on a neighboring ranch in the locality he selects, for one season. By doing this he gets a general idea of crops raised, methods of irrigation, ranging stock, etc., that will be of inestimable value to him later.

To the man who is short on capital, beef cattle are rather a slow proposition. It requires range and considerable time to develop a beef herd, therefore returns are slow. In cattle, steers give quickest returns.

Sheep offer better opportunities to the beginner, as they furnish fleece in the Spring and lambs in the Fall. They require less capital for a start than cattle, and will live on ranges where cattle will starve. Then, too, it is easier to get into sheep on a partnership basis. From sheep, and a couple of dairy cows, and hogs, one can gradually branch into cattle, horses, or whatever fancy calls for.

It is impossible to go to any part of Wyoming or Colorado, take up a homestead and make a living by trapping. These States are rapidly coming into their own in agriculture, dairying, stock-raising, etc., and the fur-bearers have about disappeared.—Frank Middleton.

Flower-Flavored Tea

HOW the Japanese combine two delicious infusions:

Question:—"Having heard there is tea in Japan called the crysanthemum tea would appreciate it very much if you would tell me how they make it."—Paul Hiller, West Hoboken, N. J.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—I myself have never heard of "crysanthemum tea." but it is quite possible that in some instances—just for the novelty—Japanese tea may be infused with the flavor of the crysanthemum flower. This is done in the case of more fragrant flowers such as the jasmine, cherry, gardenia and orange blossoms.

The method followed is: Hot water is poured on the flower petals. This is then drained off almost immediately. After that ten pounds of tea are mixed with four pounds of the flowers and allowed to stand twenty-four hours. The flower petals are then separated from the tea by sifting and fanning and hand-picking. The tea thus takes the moisture and the perfume of the flowers, both of which may be destroyed again by quick heating. The perfume thus imparted to the tea will last from one to five or six years, according to quality, strength and care in packing and keeping.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

What You Can Do with Two Skillets

GOOD-BY, Dutch oven; good-by:

Spokane, Wash.

I want to add a little to Mr. Solomons' article in "Ask Adventure" on grub-packing. Two steel skillets make an excellent Dutch oven; and every pack needs a skillet or frying-pan. Of course you can not very well make light bread, but you can make—and I have very successfully made, or rather baked—biscuits, pie and cake, or cooked roast meat or fish in them.

You use them the same as a Dutch oven. Put one upside down on the other. However, you must be careful not to have the coals too hot under the bottom one, and you want plenty of heat on the top. A few experiments will teach you the right amount of heat above and below.

BAKING BREAD IN A SINGLE FRY-PAN

Another way to bake excellent bread is with only one frying-pan—one with long handle. Mix bread up fairly stiff; build a good fire, so there will be plenty of heat for the pan. Cut a stick about twelve or fourteen inches long small enough to fit in the hole in the end of frying-pan handle.

Place frying-pan on ground about six inches from fire, put the stick in the end of frying-pan handle and gradually elevate the handle by the stick as the bread browns. I am a very poor artist, but you may be able to conceive the idea from the foregoing explanation together with the drawing enclosed. After the bread is done on one side turn it over and brown. With a little practise you will be surprized how good you can make bread in this manner.

Something else I might add is that every pack should have a few packages of coconut. A handful will take the place of a good meal. Try it. I lived about nine days once on coconut and trout—nothing else.

I might tell you that I left my home in Sugar Loaf, Colo., May 29th, 1922, with my family—wife and two children. We never slept in a house

until Oct. 18th. Came through Wyoming, Montana, part of Colorado and Idaho. We had biscuits, pie and cake, besides roasts of different kinds, all baked in two steel skillets.—FRANK EARNEST.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Note from an "A. A." Man

IT ISN'T often that Brother Charles Brown, Jr., is caught napping:

Feilding, New Zealand.

My object in writing you now is to suggest to Friend Charles Brown, Jr.—my usually well informed colleague on South Sea Island "A. A." matters—not to repeat two errors that occurred in his Cook Island answer, page 186, July 20th issue, 1922. The Cook group is not governed by New Zealand *under mandate*. He has confused Cook with Samoa. Nor did the Cook Islands ever belong to Germany. The Cook group, like New Zealand, was discovered by the famous British circumnavigator, Captain Cook, and placed under the Union Jack. By agreement with Britain the Cook Islands were annexed by New Zealand in 1900 and are a part of New Zealand territory. Also, Mr. Platts has been a stipendiary magistrate in New Zealand for nearly two years.

I take this trouble because it is a reflection upon my territory should Mr. Brown repeat the errors through not having his data up to date; and he is doing such good work that I want to extend a helping hand, not carp as a critic. Your best plan—and to save your own time and bother—would be to send this letter on to him.

Please assure Mr. Brown that he is at liberty to answer any queries from this neck of the woods that come his way because I get quite enough "A. A." queries to keep me from mischief in my spare time. *Kia Ora!*—TOM L. MILLS.

Clamshelling and Pearling

BAROQUES, referred to by Brother Spears in the subjoined letter, are irregularly shaped pearls: .

Question:—"I've found a large supply of fresh-water clams or mussels—I don't know which they are; most of these were as large as a man's hand.

Will you answer the following questions for me, please?

What is the proper way to open the oyster without endangering any pearls it may contain?

Can you tell me the companies I may sell the shells to for buttons, etc., or to whom to write concerning this? And the most reliable pearl-buyers?

In what part of the shell is the pearl found, and how should it be safely removed without destroying its luster and marketable value? Please do not print my name."— —— ——, Cañon Ferry, Mont.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—You may have something pretty good in those shells. They sell up to $2 to $4 a hundred, and even more for fancies, and perhaps $20 to $40 a ton, regulars, now. Write to *Fur News* for their book—costs about a dollar, I think. It gives all you'll need to know to start with.

About markets, the U. S. Commissioner of Fisheries, Washington, D. C., will send you a list of current shell markets.

Open shells by heating in bushel pan or kettle almost to boiling, but don't boil. When shells open, draw the fire and then shovel out the shells, and shuck out the shells, throw the meat into the river and look for pearls *before* throwing it.

Pearls in meat, loose in shell, and sometimes buried in shell. Irregular ones, rough, cloudy, and like wings, dog-teeth, etc. Baroques, or slugs—up to dollars each, but some only five cents. Round, pear-shaped, clear-colored ones up to hundreds of dollars. DON'T BOIL!

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

McPEE or GOODIER. Would like to hear from you. Address PERCY SCARBOROUGH, 57 D Street, So. Norfolk, Va.

CRISPT, LIZZIE. (Married name not known.) Last heard of in New York in March, 1909. Please write. Address MRS. P. DIAZ, 1016½ N. 87th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

SMITH, CHARLES. Last heard of in Frisco, California. Left his home in Texas in 1906. His mother is ill and would like to hear from him. Please write. Address HOGUE HAYES, Lindsay, Okla.

GILDAY, JOHN E. Was with me in Utah and Wyoming on the Union Pacific in the winter of 1917-18. Please write and will arrange to meet in Salt Lake.—Address EDWARD R. HANOVER, P. O. Box 134, Waterloo, Indiana.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WILLIAMS, JOE. Last heard of in Texas. Dark hair and eyes. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address ADA WILLIAMS, 462 S. Templeton St., Huntington Park, Calif.

GRAY, HARRY. Please write your friend. You know how he feels. Let's have one talk anyway.—G. S.

BRADFORD, ROBERT and LEWIS. Formerly of Oaxaca, Mexico. Your mother is very anxious about you, please write.—Address MRS. ROBERT BRADFORD, 3853 Seneca Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

GRAVES, JAMES FRANKLIN. Known as Frank. Last heard of was on his way to Atlantic City, N. J. His home is in Stigler, Okla. Was working for some Boston jewelry concern at the time of his disappearance. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ARTHUR, care of *Adventure*.

VAN DYKE, PETER. Please let us know where you are as you are needed. Everything is O. K. again.—Address H. OTTENS, 859 W. 71st St., Chicago, Ill.

HICKS, ESTER. Last heard of in St. Louis, April, 1911. Please write.—Address MRS. GEO. VERNON, care of *Adventure*.

O'ROURKE, EDWARD. Last heard of in Germany with A. E. F. Company L, 35th infantry brigade, 89th division. Height five feet, eleven inches, red hair, ruddy complexion. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address J. J. O'ROURKE, Assemblé Hotel, Spokane, Washington.

BARTELL, O. Last seen in Bristol, Conn., summer of 1919, believed to be in California. Write your friend.—Address SLIM, 61 High St., Terryville, Conn.

BERKING, JOE. Last known address, Little Britian, Newburg, N. Y. Please write your old friend Slim.—Address C. Kent, 61 High St., Terryville, Conn., or 2098 12th St., Detroit, Mich.

J. C. S. Return home. Everything O. K. but need you to straighten things satisfactorily.—L. S.

GRASME, ERWIN. Age nineteen, born in Hoboken, N. J., a student of interior decorating at Cooper Union. Left his home September 10, 1919 after a disagreement. Five feet nine inches tall, dark hair, brown eyes, weight 146 pounds. Has an appendix scar on right side and a birth mark on his left shoulder. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. M. GRASME, 1003 Bloomfield St., Hoboken, N. J.

KILIAN, GUSTAVE. Also known to many as Otto and Adolph. Left Cleveland for Cripple Creek, Colorado, twenty-five years ago; until about 1906 was frequently heard from in Colorado, Arizona, Nevada and California where he was connected with various mining and lumber propositions. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his family.—Address PAUL H. KILAN, 12933 Clifton Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WILLIAMS, GRANT B. Last heard from at Tillamook, Oregon in January, 1922. Age fifty-five; native of New York State. Contractor and builder. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. R. TRULL, Portland, Oregon.

THE following have been inquired for in either the January 20th or February 28th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

BAILEY, EDGAR T.; Baker, Halard; Blain, Harold F.; Bowlly, Charles and John; Berry, C. R.; Brown, Carl A.; Farmer, Frank D.; Frazer, John George; Gilday, John E.; Grant, L. S.; Greene, Cecil; Hennessy, J. M.; Herrington, Ernest Chester; Krone, Joseph; Leurkee, Gottlieb Fritz; Levine, Dave; Lewis, Oscar; Lindsay, Percy; Lucas, J. A.; Macdonald, Malcolm; McCarthy, R. N.; McCurley, T. J.; Meadows, Madge; Muller, E.; Nekring, Frederick; Powell, Jesse; Richards, Frank; Rodger, Clifford Grant; Rodgers, (Rogotzky) Theodore; Rost, John S.; "Sake", Evan, J.; Seney, A.; Shepard, Harold; Skinner, James H.; Smith, Bertha, Christina (*nee* Grant); Swiatkowski, William J.; Vanderbeck, Andrew W.; Walsh, Matthew J.; Walton, Kenneth; Wagoner, Harry R.; Williams, Miss; Wood, Theodore; Woodruff, Mary L.; Wynne, Herbert; Zitman, Eddie; Foley, Joe.

MISCELLANEOUS—Adair; Daddy we want to hear from you. Diana and Jackie boy; Els; "Leary," "Dutch" Rhynr, Kirk, "Tug" Wilson, Haines and all the rest of the gang who graduated from U. S. Navy Yeoman School, Newport, Rhode Island, Dec. 23, 1916.; Sgt. Pat Vaughn, Captain Baker, or any member of Convalescent Camp No. 2, or any member of Base Hospitals 16—66—17—18 between Sept. and Nov. 1918. Would like to hear from comrades who served in Troop B, 12th Cavalry from 1901 to 1903.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MARCH 30TH ISSUE

Besides the three complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE NIGHT OF ESCAPE — ***Rafael Sabatini***
A desperate attempt to break from a Venetian prison.

MUZZLED DOGS OF WAR — ***Magruder Maury***
Unemployed machine gunners get a job.

THAT PAIR OF SHOULDERS — ***Albert Richard Wetjen***
A South Sea's test of manhood.

PEACHES — ***Oscar J. Friend***
The homesteader fights for ranch and crop.

TERRY AN' ME — ***William H. Wells***
When the storm drowned the ship's fires.

THE NINE UNKNOWN A Five-Part Story Part II — ***Talbot Mundy***
When a Thug flicks a handkerchief a man dies.

THE MOST CONSUMMATE VILLAIN — ***Frederick R. Bechdolt***
Worst of the Old West's bad-men.

"Do You Know What It Means To Be a Slave?"

Do you know what it means—the seizure, the desert journey, the whips of the drivers, the house of the dealer, the shame!

"Take me away from HIM! Lock me up so that I can not escape, beat me if you like, and I will tell you all that I know, but while HE is my master, I will never betray HIM—"

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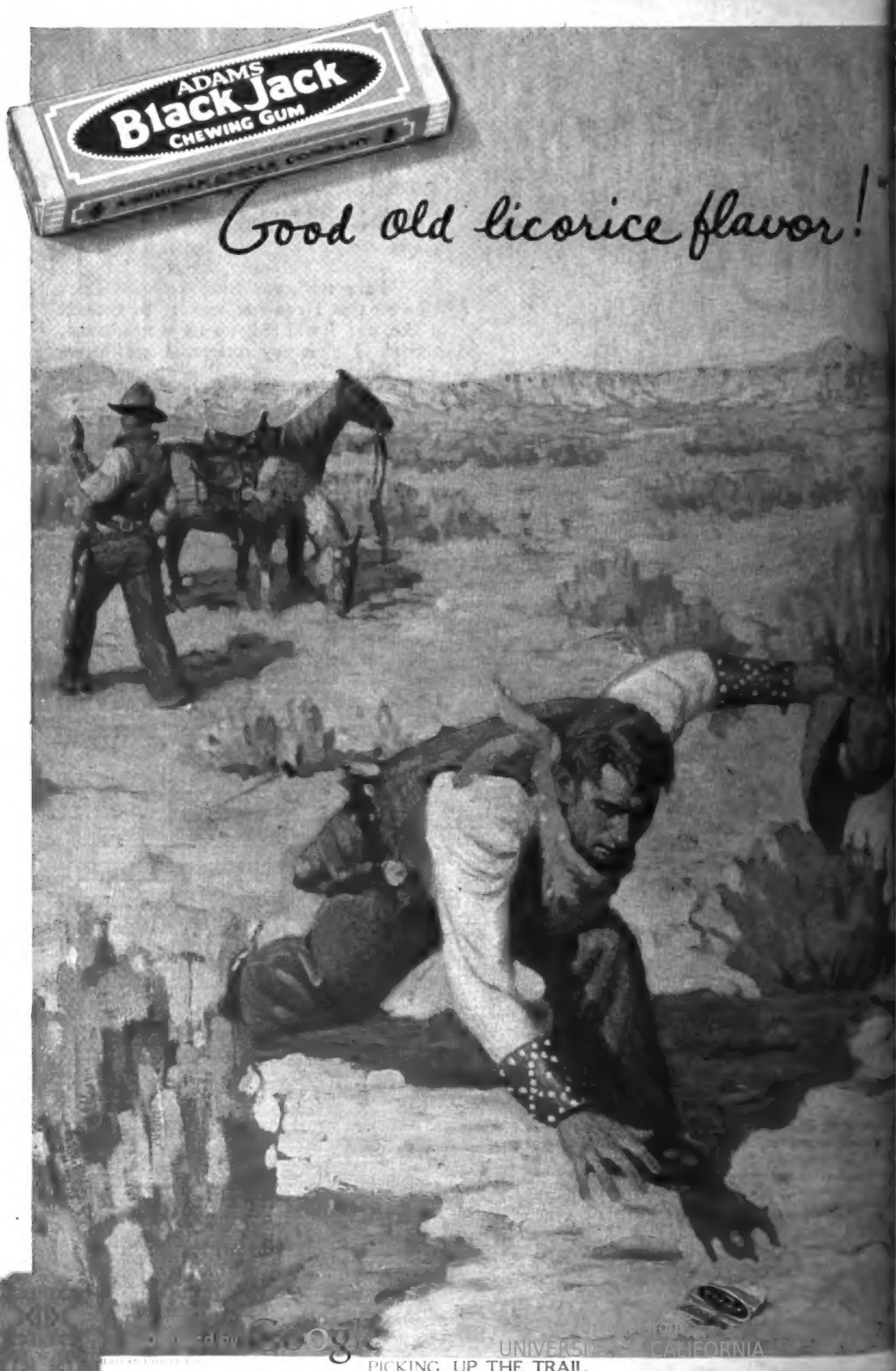

PICKING UP THE TRAIL

MARCH
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71

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